

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Ella Baker School  
K-8 Elementary/Middle School  
M225

317 EAST 67 STREET  
MANHATTAN  
NY 10065

Principal: LAURA GARCIA

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Lead Reviewer: Jacky Grossman

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Ella Baker School is a K-8 school with 328 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 31% Black, 40% Hispanic, 16% White, 6% Asian students and 3% other students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 90%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Resources are used strategically to support the school's foundational beliefs and goals and enable teachers to thoughtfully plan for individual student support. (1.3)
  - Every inch of the limited space available is used to full advantage. Hallways are generously equipped to support the intensive small group work that is expected and are also used for quiet student self-reflection. To support students with the use of technology, an office space has been converted for small groups of students to work together on multi-media projects such as video poetry that are of high caliber. The principal has realigned her budget to incorporate more hands on support for special needs learners. As a result of these strategic decisions, the students are benefiting from further individualized support and therefore producing work of high quality.
  - The entire school consists of bridge classes in which two consecutive grades of students are grouped together. However, recognizing concerns about their current sixth graders, the school opted to have a single sixth grade class. This class has been given intensive support, such as an extra intervention teacher and several other additional adults who regularly work within the classroom. This has enabled them to create micro-groups that are truly targeting the individual needs of the students. In addition, the principal strategically shuffled some of her lower grade teachers in to the older grades, due to their strength in literacy. An abundance of volunteers, aides, tutors, and student teachers are all deployed strategically to effectively reduce class size and support the small group structure that enables students to make progress.
- The school's high regard for the importance of self-actualization develops confident learners who take risks in their learning and progress well as a result. (1.4)
  - Every child is well known by virtually every adult in the school. Structures are built in to most classes that help students develop empathy and support their classmates. Last year's school survey data indicated that some students feel unsupported by classmates, so this year, there has been a redoubled effort to ensure that all classes are providing opportunities for students to work in pairs or groups, reinforcing the idea of community. As a result, when students provide one another with feedback on their dance performances, or on the quality and depth of their contributions to a classroom debate, for example, they now do this in an honest, constructive, and open way that is also friendly and sincere. Observing students' reactions to receiving this feedback and seeing how it helps them plan to improve, is evidence that this effort is paying off well.
  - Students feel very supported in achieving their goals and have high aspirations for their futures. One recent arrival shared her high school application essay, which described her experience learning English in highly sophisticated language. Another student, when asked, said "To call what we receive just 'support' would be an understatement." As a result of this highly personalized approach, students make appropriate choices for themselves and have ambitious plans for success. Students use communal venues to make decisions together about which social justice projects to support, and use these times to reflect on current issues of the day. As a result, students are empowered and engage in sophisticated, complex decision making to improve their school.

- The school gathers extensive data about students that informs programmatic and guidance decisions that are relevant and support individual student growth. (2.3)
  - The hub of student assessment is the Personal Learning Record. This is a comprehensive compilation of performance information consisting of formative data such as anecdotal and conference notes, as well as summative data such as DY0 results and running records. This information is used to create work plans for students, as well as to analyze trends school wide. These plans helped the school to identify issues among sixth grade students that resulted in a shift of resources to offer extra support and a reconfiguration of the class. These records are accessible to students, families, and teachers, thus enabling everyone to be involved in decision making for students.
  - Extensive written narratives create a complete picture of every single student and are treasured by parents for their fine detail and clear portrait of their child. Grading is based on student mastery along a continuum and is qualitative rather than quantitative. The school analyzes how individuals, groups of students, subgroups and cohorts are performing with respect to these continua, and use them in teams to determine what changes to make for individual students and groups in terms of where to focus content or skill work. In addition, a descriptive review process, in which teachers present at length about an individual student, is used to have teachers help one another to refine individual work plans for students. As a result of the extensive information gathered by teachers, students' long terms goals are met in concise, well planned steps and student progress trajectories are fluidly mapped and achieved.
- Families are full partners in setting student goals, providing input that helps teachers plan and ensures that each child's unique needs are driving significant progress. (2.4)
  - Weekly letters home offer details about expectations. Parents then offer feedback to teachers and to their children about the work they are doing on theme projects, and students do ongoing reflection on their own work. When attendance became a concern for a small group of students, the school took intense steps to ensure that parents and students re-engaged with the importance of excellent attendance. The school's attendance has risen notably, and the affected group no longer has a lateness concern. School decision making on all matters is shared by administration, faculty, parents, and age appropriate students. Initiatives such as a structured recess time, additional elective and after school classes and an extra music program are all the result of mutual conversations and reflection by the entire community, making the school a safer and more engaging place.
- The school's philosophy of learning provides students with an individualized and customized learning experience that is tailored to result in student growth. (1.2)
  - The school's pedagogical approach centers on student voice and choice and is based on theories of Habits of Mind, which involves developing meta-cognitive processes of teaching students how to think. Teachers and students determine their next steps based on skill level and interest. A main component of each day is work time, during which students choose what they want to work on within the scope of the current units of study. They are guided by teachers who spend time with most every student every day informally assessing progress towards understanding of each unit's goals and big ideas. There is universal understanding about the goals of this approach. Students produce work that reflects deep understanding of the big ideas being studied, and demonstrate significant growth in intellectual achievement.

- Students are typically given tasks that foster critical thinking. They may make up their own math problems using an underlying concept, debate current political events, or write stories that are written from the perspective of important historical figures. Rich questions propel student thinking. Teachers direct small groups and guide individual learning, whether through hands-on materials or customized graphic organizers. In one fourth grade class, students considered the question of whether or not George Washington could be considered a great leader, as he was also a slave owner. In another classroom, students debated the causes of the Great Depression, by focusing on "Whose fight was it?" Students experience a high level of conversation and produce arguments that are cogent and well-researched.
- The school's highly intellectual environment and clear expectations for personal growth results in high levels of self-motivation for students and staff. (3.4)
  - Parents, students and teachers all express that the development of a scholarly mindset is of the highest priority for the school. "We are expected to be thinkers and to work to our fullest potential," reports one eighth grader. Students are encouraged to begin thinking about the next phase of their educations as early as fifth grade. Extensive and deeply individualized high school application counseling ensures that students are well matched to schools that are appropriate for them, and many students aspire to attend top tier schools.
  - Students receive tailored support to help scaffold them to success. Parents of special education students express that the process for developing their children's individualized education programs (IEP) is highly useful and rewarding. Because the school utilizes a personal learning record, students as well as parents have a thorough understanding of strengths and weaknesses, and are able to contribute meaningfully to the writing of the IEPs. Every teacher who works with these students participates in the process. This sense of ownership enables their children to improve rapidly and produce work not previously expected.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Continue to develop rich curricula in all grades and subject areas to ensure that all students are supported towards meeting increased demands. (1.1)
  - The school is working towards full alignment in the Common Core Learning Standards, while striving to maintain their value on student choice. For example, in one room, students engaged in a protocol called a silent conversation, in which they each had to contribute in writing, an insight in response to an argument on a critical topic, building on what their classmates said. They then used these documents, to write their own argument about the topic at hand. However, while individual activities in literacy and social studies may be thought provoking, they do not fully reside in an aligned curriculum in all content areas. While teacher and student interest drive daily planning, these interests are not always embedded coherently, resulting in some gaps between and across grades. As a result, some students, in particular higher achieving students are not demonstrating the same proportion of progress as their peers.
  - Science curricula are not aligned completely with standards and middle school students are not benefiting from the same level of integration as with social studies, for example. All three grades are taught together, and eighth graders are not receiving high school preparatory science content. Teachers are teaching based on their own knowledge and interest rather than standards based content. For example, in one class, one third of the class period was devoted to a guessing

game that was meant to simulate the concept of how disease spread. While motivating at first, the activity quickly became repetitive and deeper content understanding was not developed. Eighth grade students express that they are not feeling challenged in science and are concerned that they are unprepared for high school level science.

- Incorporate systems for feedback that ensures each teacher continually progresses in their practice to meet the increased demands for rigorous student learning. (4.1)
  - Feedback to teachers is not incorporated in a formal, formative process. Administrators have started to conduct some observations using a common framework but teachers' awareness of the framework is minimal at this point, and feedback is not always offered in a fashion that allows for clear follow-up or desired growth. In some instances, this has resulted in teachers' practice not keeping pace with the changing demands of deeper academic standards. The middle school science program is now being taught by all three middle school teachers, and they have not yet received sufficient support or feedback, which has resulted in a less rigorous science program as compared to the other content areas. Although the teaching practices throughout the school consistently reflect the school's deeply held philosophy, there are no articulated plans to ensure that each teacher continues to evolve and progress over time. There is a lot of passionate discourse about teaching but there is limited accountability for teachers to develop new practice that meets changing needs.
- Refine existing collaborations to sharpen the focus on teacher practice, in order to ensure that improving specific student outcomes is the goal of every team. (4.2)
  - The school has scheduled weekly team meeting time, and also during one additional half day per month. Every classroom teacher is part of a cohort team. Although the staff are very collegial and do collaborate in many ways, structured collaboration with student progress as the goal has not yet permeated each team. Teachers share what they are doing but the discussions are not always grounded in student work and do not yet promote full mutual accountability. There is some reliance on a three student model to anchor conversations, but the teams are not fully utilizing an inquiry approach. Some teams use protocols and others do not. Teachers actively participate in the teams and contribute equitably, but the teams are not used as a conscious tool for developing leadership.
- Further utilize assessment tools and data to develop a clear understanding of trends and patterns in order to support the development of coherent curriculum in all subjects for all students. (2.2)
  - The school creates their own assessments, many of which are performance based. Because they do not have common assessments, most teachers design rubrics to assess large scale projects or end of unit tasks. The quality of these rubrics is generally high, though a few teachers still struggle to make the rubric appropriately match desired outcomes. Some teachers use rubrics very well to conference with students, which helps them adequately plan their next steps, while others limit their evaluation to circling the ratings in each category, resulting in some misunderstanding for students about exactly where they succeeded or fell short. Some teams analyze the results of tasks via the rubric to discuss how lessons might be modified or tasks might be made more appropriate for groups of students, such as higher performers, but they are not always using the outcomes to make changes to curriculum as a school. This contributes to the gaps in coherence across and between grade levels that sometimes interferes with student progress.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

<b>School name: Ella Baker School</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?		<b>X</b>		
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			<b>X</b>	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?				<b>X</b>
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				<b>X</b>
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?		<b>X</b>		
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?				<b>X</b>
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?				<b>X</b>
<b>Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?			<b>X</b>	
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?			<b>X</b>	
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			<b>X</b>	

<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?		<b>X</b>					
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		<b>X</b>					
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			<b>X</b>				
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			<b>X</b>				
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?			<b>X</b>				
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			<b>X</b>				
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			<b>X</b>				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			<b>X</b>				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>