

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

PS/IS 268
K-8 School 268

92-07 175 STREET
QUEENS
NY 11433

Principal: Lissa Grant-Stewart

Dates of Review: January 31-February 1, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Veronica Yurcik

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

PS/IS 268 is a K-8 school with 573 students from kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 51% Black, 19% Hispanic, 2% White, 24% Asian students, and 3% other students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 94.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Shared beliefs about learning drive daily hands-on learning experiences that motivate and engage students to produce meaningful work products. (1.2)
 - o Across classrooms teachers align lessons to the school's established curriculum, and design classroom instruction that supports a strong-shared belief system that students learn best by doing. As a result, there is consistent school-wide implementation of hands-on learning experiences within workshop model instruction, and student grouping to foster cooperative work.
 - o Teachers create daily opportunities for students to share their thinking with peers, fostering cognitive engagement and improved comprehension that is reflected in the ease with which students converse with peers, help each other, and in the care they take in producing work. In an eighth grade class, students defended their claims about characters' thinking by using textual evidence to support their reasoning. In a grade 5 science class, students worked in small groups conducting a science lab on erosion and deposition, verbally sharing their observations, making decisions about what to record, and discussing their predictions and hypotheses.
- The principal makes strategic organizational decisions that support school goals and professional collaboration to improve student-learning experiences. (1.3)
 - o Scheduling of daily common preps and frequent opportunities for cross-grade teamwork increases collaboration and pedagogical understanding of learning connections through the grades, supporting instructional initiatives, and resulting in a greater uniformity of practice. Across classrooms, writing skills are taught and practiced across content areas, and the use of thinking maps helps scaffold tasks so that all students are afforded opportunities to be meaningfully engaged. The principal synchronized the elementary and middle school schedules intentionally to further support cross-grade collaboration and bridge gaps between lower and upper grades, thus providing for a cohesiveness of action as a whole school. Despite yearly budget decreases, the union representative credits the principal with making arts a priority, scheduling and allocating resources so that students benefit from participation in dance, music, and visual arts.
 - o Screening resumes and phone conversations precede in-person interviews, and candidate demonstration lessons are witnessed by a school team. This tactical policy helps ensure that new hires exhibit a positive work ethic in supporting student learning and the school's instructional beliefs and goals. Strategic grouping of kindergarten through grade 3 English language learners within classrooms enables increased support of and collaboration with specialist teachers to better serve the unique needs of these students. In addition, lead teachers are appointed the responsibility of guiding grade level work promoting accountability and shared responsibility.
- Administration evaluates operations, curriculum, and pedagogy regularly making intentional adjustments to improve coherence of practice to further student learning outcomes. (5.1)

- o Astute evaluation of the school's literacy program is leading to ongoing adjustments to increase rigor and improve instruction to acquire specific skills. Accordingly, the school added comprehension resources incorporating higher order thinking questions, explicit instruction in grammar, and non-fiction texts to meet the higher complexity demands of Common Core Standards, improving expectations and supports for performance outcomes. In addition, the school implemented a new English language learner periodic assessment this fall, recognizing that these students were taking extensive time to test out of English as a second language services, and that better information was needed in order to take informed strategic actions to accelerate these students' progress.
- o Regular cabinet and teacher teams meetings are in-place, enabling on-going reflection regarding instructional decisions. During the past year, this time has been used judiciously to evaluate pacing calendars and to develop literacy curriculum maps that allocate units and topics to align with Common Core Standards expectations more closely. Thus, students across all grades experience a curriculum with an increased focus on non-fiction and persuasive and argumentative writing.
- Respectful interactions between staff and students shape a supportive learning environment that promotes self-improvement. (1.4)
 - o Both students and parents strongly express that students are safe in school. Adult-student interactions reflect a commitment to help, and trustfulness on the part of students is exhibited by their active participation in class, willingness to ask questions, and cooperatively work with adults. In response to teacher concerns regarding school climate expressed in the Learning Environment Survey, the principal has established a professional development program through a grant to institute an improved systems for management of middle school students and a better understanding between lower and upper grade teachers in serving the whole school community.
 - o Students enjoy speaking about their learning and express that supervisors and teachers want them to do their best. This is evidenced in their attention to completing all work tasks assigned in their classrooms. In addition, they note that advisory "makes kids' lives easier," that "the best thing about our teachers is that they really help us", and they name supervisors, teachers, counselors and aides who they trust in to confide concerns. Thus, students clearly feel they receive support and that it makes a positive difference.
- The school engages families successfully, promoting open communication and investment in the school community and students' continued learning. (2.4)
 - o Parents describe a variety of established communication practices including lower grade weekly newsletters, a school website where homework can be accessed, log-in ability to view student achievement posted on the Acuity and ARIS websites, mailed progress reports, and an open door access policy to supervisors and staff. They note that these practices keep them informed, make expectations clear, and enable them to work with school staff for the benefit of their children. One parent stated that there is always opportunity for a "face to face" and that is "vital" in terms of communication. A 94.9% attendance rate attests to the school's ability to cultivate parents' trust and support.
 - o An active parents teachers' association, the school leadership team, a parent volunteer group, and multiple monthly workshops and meetings coordinated by a

proactive parent coordinator provide regular opportunities that engage parents regarding school operations and instructional decisions.

What the school needs to improve

- Re-evaluate curriculum to ensure the integration of challenging Common Core Standards' aligned tasks across curriculum areas to ensure post secondary readiness for all students. (1.1)
 - o Although the school has begun a purposeful evaluation of its curricula and is working to create curriculum maps aligned to common core, the development and use of maps is "a new venture". The school has not yet clearly identified key trends indicating where emphasis is needed to improve students' overall performance rate. Exploration of key connections to common core for math is just beginning. While student tasks encourage problem solving and explanation, overall math problem solving emphasizes procedural methods and explanations. Thus, students miss opportunities to demonstrate mathematical thinking and to undertake multiple solution paths, essential to successful achievement in math.
 - o While teachers successfully promote students' academic conversations and positive work habits, and plan differentiated tasks, activities are not sufficiently scaffolded so that all students are engaged and challenged. In an integrated team teaching math class, some students waited for teacher intervention, as they were unable to tackle the assignments on their own, while more advanced students completed work quickly and waited while teachers worked with other students.
- Ensure that formative assessments are closely aligned to curriculum, analyzed carefully to promote better student outcomes, and result in timely and informed instructional modifications. (2.2)
 - o While the school employs a variety of formative assessments, information gained from analyses is not always timely and/or specific. The school, waiting for the completion of February periodic assessments to compare to November baselines, acknowledged that a lapse of ongoing evaluation of student understanding makes it difficult to understand the effectiveness of instruction. Other assessments, such as Performance Series, provide initial baseline and end-of-year results, but the inability to access specific test questions limits the item analysis necessary for understanding causal factors influencing student performance. Thus, the lack of an ongoing, timely assessment system closely aligned to the instructional program and key standards impairs the school's ability to make needed instructional adjustments proactively to improve student progress.
 - o Teacher teams, although focusing on improving teacher practice, and supplementing summative data by reviewing periodic assessment results and classroom work, do not speak to strengths and needs of grade, subject, or special populations. As a result, discussion regarding significant trends is limited and inhibits strategic curriculum and instructional adjustments needed to improve student academic outcomes.
- Retool observation feedback protocols and use of teacher effectiveness rubrics to promote a more reflective pedagogy and explicit understanding of next steps to improve teaching and learning. (4.1)

- o The observation record reflects a combination of informal and formal observations. However, there is not yet an established system to ensure that all teachers benefit from frequent cycles of observation. Thus, administration is missing opportunities to provide sustained feedback and next steps to improve pedagogy. Several tenured teachers state that they do not get enough specific feedback to inform their teaching while less experienced teachers disagree, expressing appreciation for supervisors' feedback.
- o Supervisors demonstrate understanding of rigorous pedagogy and needed next steps. However, written feedback to teachers, while being explicit in terms of expectations, is not always specific enough to guide teachers' understanding of next-step pedagogical moves. An informal observation states an expectation for improved teacher questioning but does not outline specific examples and/or suggestions identifying how to improve questioning. The administration is working to develop an informal teacher evaluation system connected to the Danielson rubric to meet the Chancellor's outlined expectations. Thus, communal rubric study, the development of common language, and forward progression through levels to improve pedagogy that increases student cognitive engagement and performance is not yet an established practice.
- Develop tools to facilitate data analysis so that key trends are more evident and useful in enabling timely curriculum and teaching adjustments to improve student-learning outcomes. (2.3)
 - o Current tools focus on class results and do not sufficiently aggregate and organize data to illuminate school-wide trends in formative and summative assessments. Thus, information regarding grade, subject, and sub-groups is not readily apparent. This negatively impacts on the school's ability to effectively coordinate a data-based response for informing instructional and curriculum modifications to improve academic outcomes.
 - o While teams and individual teachers use several tools to capture and analyze student performance data, and some teachers have begun to develop their own tools to better understand class performance trends, overall organization of data to demonstrate trends is not an established competence. Thus, potential opportunities to gain strategic data for instructional decisions are missed and as a result instructional groupings tend to be based on achievement levels rather than specific academic needs.
- Create tracking systems to monitor and evaluate progress and enable strategic on-going adjustments toward achievement of school goals. 3.3
 - o School leaders access periodic assessment results, conference notes, running records, and portfolio tasks, to reflect on achievement. However, evaluative analysis is not geared to school-wide views and concurrent modifications. While data informs goal setting, findings are not communicated widely, thereby limiting potential positive impact from school-wide community support.
 - o While the school has initiated common portfolio assessments this year, the work of designing common rubrics and assessments across the school is newly developing. Designed portfolio tasks focus on mostly routine tasks and discrete skills and thus do not provide enough essential information to evaluate learning critically and to strategically adjust goals and instructional practices to meet student sub-group needs.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: PS/IS 268	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score		X		
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?		X		
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?			X	
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?			X	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
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.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			X	
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?		X		
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?		X		
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?			X	
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.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
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?		X		
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?			X	
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?		X		
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			X	

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.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
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?		X		
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		X		
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?			X	
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?			X	

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.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
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?			X	
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?		X		
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?		X		
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		X		

Quality Review Scoring Key

UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed
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