

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Alice Austen Elementary School

Elementary School R060

55 Merrill Avenue

Staten Island

New York 10314

Principal: Bonnie Ferretti

Dates of review: March 8 - 9, 2012

Reviewer: Kathleen A. Burgess

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Alice Austen School is an elementary school with 919 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 59% White, 24% Hispanic, 11% Asian, 5% Black and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 23% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 94%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders use student work and data to enhance the curriculum with resources, materials and academic tasks that emphasize rigorous habits and higher order skills to cognitively engage all students. (1.1)
 - Across grades and content areas, teachers develop meaningful rigorous experiences to cognitively engage students and increase the complexity of in-school tests. Students engage in tiered academic tasks that include the range of critical thinking skills. Using multiple sources of evidence across time periods and genres, fifth graders analyze the impact of immigration during the Industrial Revolution comparing their findings to current immigration trends. Students extend their thinking, develop thought provoking questions, and engage in lively discussions, advancing the school's goal for students to produce informational reports.
 - Teachers use curricula resources and assessment results to develop academic tasks aligned to intended outcomes and designed to challenge student thinking. Assessment reviews showed that subgroups were not meeting progress goals. Academic tasks around the concept of rational numbers using multiple interpretations and physical models were developed to cognitively engage all students including these subgroups. Modifications were made for students with individualized education plans (IEP) by providing options for perception, and using multimedia to present key concepts in various forms of symbolic representation. Additionally, all key information was provided in both the dominant language and the native language to promote understanding across languages for English language learners (ELLs). There were multiple correct responses to the tiered activities related to the task. Each student had many opportunities to perform at their level of ability as they worked independently, with a partner, or in a group resulting in the school's commitment to plan rigorous tasks to engage all students.
- Administrators strategically use resources to make decisions that support the school's instructional goals to improve instruction and accelerate student outcomes through rigorous academic tasks. (1.3)
 - Funds are prioritized to purchase trade books, programs, SMART boards and laptops for teachers to access information and promote student outcomes. Per session funds provide additional instructional time for identified students. Teachers receive two common prep periods to meet, discuss and plan instruction for targeted students. The faculty collaboratively agreed to create an additional inquiry time to meaningfully engage in inquiry work and develop academic tasks. These sessions engage staff in concrete reciprocal talk about teaching practice and how to best improve student outcomes. Teachers use this extended time to create grade level non-fiction units, academic tasks aligned to the standards, and rubrics aligned to the units that assess student performance. The use of resources supported by strategic decisions advances the school's goal to improve instruction and accelerate outcomes for students through rigorous academic tasks.
- The school leadership creates an environment that nurtures student and adult learning to promote the pedagogical growth of teachers and support the social and academic development of students. (1.4)

- Teachers are encouraged to share their interests and skills, and participate in research as part of their growth to become nationally board certified. Administrators make adjustments for teachers to attend external professional development opportunities to build their knowledge and skills. Service learning and civic engagement promote students' social and emotional growth. Students spoke passionately of the School Enrichment Model and the opportunities to engage in various activities beyond the academics. One student noted, "I have a different teacher when I go to chorus and I like how she really teaches us about the song before we get to sing and sometimes we get to write our own songs." The coherence of these activities supports the schools vision to nurture learning for all while promoting students social and academic needs.
- Students engage in activities that develop their academic and artistic skills demonstrating a level of self-efficacy, with a mix of challenge and personal support. One student said, "My teacher gives me hard work but then there is a bonus question and sometimes I know I have to ask for help." Another student shared, "I can achieve my goals if I work hard." All students participate in a program that builds character and respect and sit on committees, such as school spirit week, select books for boys, and the cafeteria committee noting that they like when the principal implements their recommendations. They indicated that they have a sense of ownership of their learning as evidenced by their drive and efforts to become and remain members of the Honor Roll.
- Teachers create rubrics aligned to the school's instructional focus and use a range of data that analyzes the strengths and needs of students to make instructional adjustments and promote progress for all students. (2.2)
 - Teachers use a coherent data system comprised of multiple assessments to develop rubrics that monitor the effectiveness of their teaching. They examine the information and make adjustments to curriculum and instruction. Grade level data showed that fifth grade students needed support with writing informational reports which resulted in the development of flexible groupings, modifications to the curriculum maps and tiered assignments. These actions provided a more thorough picture of student learning to determine mastery of the content. As a result, teachers report they are more responsive to the instructional adjustments needed to accelerate student outcomes evidenced by 61.75% of all students performing at benchmark level on the Interim Progress Report.
 - Teachers document student performance using classroom level assessments and the results of standardized tests. The summative results of the Continental test indicated the need to support subgroups of students not making adequate progress. Teachers reviewed the underlying causes of the difficulties that students experience, identified student needs and infused strategies to help students decode, retain sight words, correctly spell words, comprehend written and oral language, and think critically. This approach to data analysis helped teachers understand the multiple cognitive processes related to student performance, resulting in targeted interventions that accelerate student progress.
- The principal consistently conveys a message of high expectations to staff and families that holds them accountable for student performance to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to achieve these expectations. (3.4)
 - The Staff Handbook and the annual Principal's Expectations document outlines the academic, instructional and professional expectations for staff by outlining

standards in behavior and performance. Teachers articulated that they are expected to be instrumental in moving students to the next level and regularly work beyond the school day to support students, advancing the school's policy of holding teachers accountable for student performance.

- The school's monthly newsletter, 60 Minutes, and the school website consistently communicate school expectations and information that engages parents to strengthen their involvement in their child's education. Parents have multiple opportunities to understand how to transfer the school's expectations into at home activities that support their child. A parent noted that the work is now much harder for their child but the school is keeping the parent informed of what they need to do every step of the way. Staff and external consultants conduct workshops on ARIS, the new Department of Education initiatives, the shift towards academic rigor through the demands of the new standards, and the student's academic and social needs, as part of advancing the school's mission to nurture and value children so they become skilled, productive, creative and concerned citizens.
- Administrators conduct frequent cycles of classroom observation to capture teachers' strengths and provide actionable feedback that improves pedagogical practices and promotes professional growth. (4.1)
 - Teachers are informed in writing of their scheduled formal observation. All lessons reflect the response to three questions that include addressed standards, how data is used to plan instruction and tasks in multiple classroom settings, and the level of differentiated instruction. At the end of the observation, teachers receive comprehensive feedback in writing and in a reciprocal conversation with the principal around observed pedagogy, teacher strengths and areas of improvement related to increased student performance, resulting in a cycle of professional support that strengthens pedagogical capacity and student outcomes.
 - A research-based framework is used to clearly communicate to teachers the expectations for standards of pedagogical practice and performance. School leaders conduct short, targeted cycles of focused observations based on specific competencies from the Danielson rubric and provide feedback in a collegial manner, reciprocally discussing the strengths, gaps and next pedagogical steps with teachers. In a follow up observation by administration to a third grade class, the school leader highlighted the instructional strategies utilized, noting how they had improved the flow of the lesson. Thus the school's commitment to improve pedagogical practice and promote professional growth continues to advance.

What the school needs to improve

- Increase the rigor of the instructional strategies across grades and content areas to provide all students with multiple entry points into the curriculum in order to develop high levels of student thinking and discussion. (1.2)
 - Instructional practices reflect the school's belief that children learn best when they feel empowered to try with the proper scaffolding of instruction. In some classes teaching required staff to engage in direct instruction with students responding to set questions. In other classes, learning was transferred to the students who were actively engaged in literature circles or inquiry-based experiential learning tasks that allowed them to deepen their understanding of

what they were learning and why they were learning it. They constructed viable opinions and critiqued the reasoning of their peers. However, the strategies did not fully provide extensions across the curricula thus reducing the school's ability to deepen the levels of student thinking.

- Expand the structured professional collaborations that monitor the implementation of key elements of teacher work to improve outcomes for all learners. (4.2)
 - All staff members engage in grade level or instructional inquiry teams. Teams use the school's data system and student work to analyze gaps in student performance with a follow up design of instructional tasks that support student needs. Task driven meetings focus on the analysis of student work products and sharing of opportunities to hone pedagogical skills to develop new understandings on instructional moves that improve teaching. However, infusing key elements of teacher work is not fully embedded across grades missing opportunities to implement a wider range of instructional strategies to improve student outcomes.
- Extend guidance supports and student data information to external providers who share the responsibility of student outcomes to strategically monitor their performance and progress. (4.4)
 - Students and families have access to the School Based Support Team for support and guidance as students move to middle school. Administrators have partnered with external organizations to extend services for students after school, on weekends and during school breaks. They share the data system that analyzes and addresses a much broader spectrum of student learning needs. However, this data is not shared with external partners selected by families to share the responsibility of accelerating student outcomes through Supplementary Educational Services (SES) reducing the school's ability to monitor the performance of SES consumers.
- Strengthen the structures that evaluate the effectiveness of professional collaborations and monitor the leadership development opportunities to support the development of teacher leadership. (5.4)
 - School leaders evaluate the effectiveness of teacher teams through ongoing reviews of observation notes, teacher evaluations, reports of the core instructional team, recommendations for adjustments to current curricula and student results. Additionally, they monitor the team meeting processes to ascertain that all teachers equitably and interchangeably assume leadership roles. They further maintain records of staff participating in internal and external capacity building sessions with the explicit expectation that knowledge gained would be formally shared with colleagues. However, the team work is now expanding to include coherence between curricula, instruction, assessment, climate, culture, and attendance practices while more teachers are signing on to become nationally certified. As a result, school leaders are not fully able to optimize its goal to develop teacher leaders.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: The Alice Austen Elementary School	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