

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Robert J. Christen
Elementary School 081

5550 RIVERDALE AVENUE
BRONX
NY 10471

Principal: MELODIE MASHEL

Dates of review: March 1 - 2, 2012
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Gonzalez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Robert J. Christen is an elementary school with 687 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 9% Black, 39% Hispanic, 31% White, 13% Asian students, and 1% other students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 94.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well-developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's curriculum is well aligned to key Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and reflects higher order thinking tasks that foster independence in all learners. (1.1)
 - o The administration and faculty of this school have spent a considerable amount of time "marinating" in the Common Core Learning Standards, (CCLS), over the past two years via network summer institutes, professional development, inquiry work and grade level meetings. These efforts have resulted in the alignment of the curriculum to the CCLS in reading, writing, and math, with a focus on respective key standards of reading and analyzing informational text, writing opinions and arguments in response to text, number sense, operations, measurement and geometry. Substantial work around instructional planning and task design includes the use of the Depth of Knowledge rubric to assess rigor, and a school-specific child-friendly, "Effort" rubric is widely used by teachers and students to assess perseverance, independence, and levels of thinking. Extensive arts partnerships engage students in authentic collaborations with professionals, social studies classes offer students choice in projects, science requires journaling and a culminating research project for a science exposition, and math and literacy provide many opportunities for collaborative problem solving and peer assessment that includes feedback during student partnerships. Effective language scaffolds for English language learners (ELL' s)and targeted supports for students with disabilities, as well as extensions for students who have attained mastery are also included in teachers' lesson plans and feedback on student work. This focused curriculum work supports all learners in developing rigorous habits and skills as seen in the student work and progress noted in interim assessments such as Acuity, Teachers' College, (TC) benchmarks, and the Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System, (ELCAS).
- Across classrooms, well-planned lessons reflect opportunities for effective student collaboration ensuring cognitive engagement and student ownership of learning. (1.2)
 - o Reflective of the school wide belief, aligned with research based practices in fostering independence in student learning, teachers are embedded the practice of engaging students in partner work at various points in lessons. In a fifth grade class students gave each other critical feedback on whether their comparison of two texts was adequate based on a rubric. In a kindergarten class, students worked in pairs to make sure they each used a learned strategy for decoding "tricky words." A fourth grade group used partner work to provide feedback to each other on whether their "pros" and "cons" were sufficient to support a persuasive letter about a social issue, while the teacher worked with a targeted group to assist them in selecting transition words to improve their persuasive essays. In a special education classroom, including ELL's, students opted to work independently or in pairs and the teacher ensured scaffolds in her lessons. These practices have led to increased student thinking and engagement and academic growth supported by data comparing grade 3 through grade 5 baseline and midline assessments from September to January. Acuity and TC results show respectively, that an average of 75% ELL's, 80% of students with disabilities, (SWD), and 78% of students performing in the lowest third, have demonstrated progress in math key standard areas and 60% ELL's, 74% SWD's and 73%students in the lowest third have demonstrated progress in ELA.

- The principal makes thoughtful organizational decisions around teacher assignments and the use of staff and student time in alignment with school goals and support student achievement. (1.3)
 - o The principal's actions clearly reflect that student data drives the budget and that she and her staff have a "whatever it takes" attitude in terms of supporting student needs. The hiring of an additional teacher to serve as part time librarian, a part time academic intervention teacher, and two full time reading specialists, hired for the early childhood and upper grades, supports the school's response to the higher demands of the CCLS. To address noted gaps in math, teachers with strong math skills push-in to various classes to support small groups and individual students during math instruction. The budget has also been prioritized to allow for additional meeting time for teachers to engage in professional study groups. Their, deep analysis of student work informs adjustments in teaching and grouping of students for instruction during the regular math block as well as for academic intervention. These strategic supports have resulted in 80% to 100% of students in each academic intervention service group scoring 85 or higher on the iReady assessments indicating proficiency, which was further confirmed by predictive Acuity data for all subgroups and grades.
- Teachers effectively use data from a variety of assessments to make strategic adjustments to instructional practice. (2.2)
 - o Rubrics, created by grade level teams assess student's mastery of the standards and content relative to skill development, and are used across the grade to ensure class-to-class consistency of expectation and rigor in student work. School wide rubrics specific to "Effort" and the science exposition are adjusted to reflect grade level appropriate language and student self assessment language. Teachers use these rubrics to provide precise and actionable feedback to students about their strengths and areas for improvement. Students articulate they "know what to do to get to the next level" and describe a successful paper as a "4" on their rubric.
 - o Teachers' data binders are referred to when planning for student grouping or targeted individual support. Data that includes student work is extensively discussed during team meetings and with individual students. Student work is analyzed alongside summative assessment data and current item analyses from predictive and interim data such as iReady, Acuity and archived ELA assessments, giving a clear picture of student growth and progress. The resulting planning sessions effectively allow for identifying groupings of students with similar patterns of needs and planning extensions for students who are exhibiting skill mastery, thus all students are engaged in challenging tasks and provided the necessary supports to accelerate their learning.
- The school's effective teacher development and support process includes focused, meaningful feedback from administrators and colleagues and improves instructional practice. (4.1)
 - o Teachers indicate that the short, frequent visits to their classrooms by administrators, and peers, are invaluable as the provided feedback offers opportunities for ongoing reflection on their practice and has led to a an exchange of ideas and resources to improve practice school wide. The school's implementation of the Danielson framework competencies has evolved from an awareness of the various components to a shared understanding amongst teachers of how designing instruction around anticipated learning outcomes for students links to other key aspects of practice. Administrators provide specific

examples of how to improve practice both verbally and in writing and connect the feedback to student work and progress data. This has led to a collegial environment throughout the school in which teachers are reflective and consistently strive for optimal learning by their students.

- o A review of each administrator's observation reports reveal a consistent approach to noting key aspects of the learning environment including learning objectives, activities, and questioning and discussion techniques. Teacher's strengths and needs are clearly noted with reference to the selected framework competency, and specific next steps such as, "in order to extend student thinking, consider asking higher level questions for discussion" and "be specific about the learning goals for the lesson, so that students are aware of their own learning" provides a clear pathway for elevating instructional practice school wide.
- School level goals are focused and aligned to student and staff needs, providing clear expectations for student achievement and professional growth. (3.1)
 - o Goals for the school are fully aligned to the Citywide expectations around teacher effectiveness and the integration of the CCLS and include specificity around improvement in math performance, especially for students performing in the lowest third for ELA and math based on summative data. Beyond these broader goals, the principal clearly communicates the need for fostering student independence across content areas and grades as well as for supporting students social-emotional needs and thus provides staff development for faculty in strategies to attain these goals in their classrooms. As a result of this clarity, administrators, staff, and families, work cohesively towards supporting student performance and progress thus ensuring success both academically and behaviorally.
 - o Goals that are shared with faculty, students and their families in a variety of venues that include summer planning beginning in June and continuing throughout the summer, solidifies staff commitment and understanding. Students are made aware of their strengths and needs early in September, and participate in tracking their progress throughout the year in alignment with school wide interim assessments. Parents are engaged in conversations about progress and goals for the school during school leadership team meetings, parent association meetings, and in an initiative called the Principal Liaison Committee, a smaller representation of parents that meets monthly with the principal to discuss school goals, especially around the two priority areas of the CCLS and math instruction as well as other areas of concern of the school community. As a result, there is a shared sense of accountability throughout the school community.
- The school has a safe, caring environment that supports students' academic and social-emotional learning and teachers' professional growth. (1.4)
 - o The administration, faculty, and support staff are very caring and treat every student in a warm and friendly manner. Students say the school feels like "home" and that they know the teachers care and want them to do well. There is similar sentiment amongst parents who shared detailed anecdotes relative to their concerns about their children's academic or social emotional development. One parent said she received more assistance to help her with her child through the guidance and support staff at this school than she had received in years from external services. Students say they know they can talk to their teachers about anything and that the adults will listen. Students with emotional needs are addressed with care and dignity as evidence in one class where a student

expressed some frustration and the students and staff in the room, as well as external support staff, responded appropriately and welcomed him back to the lesson when he was ready. Thus, students and teachers are confident they can succeed and are supported to excel in their respective roles.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine the process for organizing and sharing interim student performance trends across the school improve teachers' understanding of adjustments and progress being made towards school wide goals. (2.3)
 - o Administrators and teachers use of a school level Excel-based tool organizes and aggregates yearlong student performance and progress data. This information is shared with teachers to assist them in their planning and grouping of students for supports and extensions. It is clear that teachers know what individual students need and how to move them. However, there is limited understanding of the link between performance and progress trends in their classrooms as they relate to the achievement of overall school goals. Thus, there are missed opportunities to enhance teachers' practice in this area.
- Ensure that teachers continue to utilize their individual classroom data analysis for tracking student progress to adjust goals for groups and individual students throughout the course of the year. (3.3)
 - o Administrators use school level tools to keep track of student progress in all content areas using a variety of assessments including Acuity, TC benchmarks, iReady, ECLAS, and archived ELA assessments. Teachers similarly have access to these reports and additionally capture student progress from class work and observations of student participation. However, teachers have not yet identified specific necessary adjustments to ensure sufficient extensions with suitable rigor for higher-achieving students, thus limiting even higher performance.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on the current data analysis tools so that they can be suitably revised and used effectively to articulate feedback and monitor student performance and progress. (5.2)
 - o Teams regularly evaluate and adjust rubrics based on CCLS-aligned student work. A first grade team, after analyzing an ELL's work, decided she had indeed completed the "All About ..." book with proficiency, but the rubric was not capturing her achievement. By making an adjustment to accommodate the student's success, the team was able to re-reflect on her product and assign an appropriate rating to the work. Although teachers refer to data frequently and use it to plan lessons and group students appropriately, the current team structure provides little time for reflection on possible revisions of these tools. The absence of this reflective process limits opportunities for adapting systems to more closely align with the school's improved instructional practice and acceleration of learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Robert J. Christen	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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