

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

The School of International Cultures

Elementary School 179

468 East 140th street

Bronx

NY 10454

Principal: Sherry Font Williams

Dates of review: February 28 – 29, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Yolanda Torres

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The School of International Cultures is an elementary school with 395 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 19% Black, 77% Hispanic, 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1% Multi-Racial, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 28% English language learners and 21% 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 93.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Teachers differentiate instruction to address the academic needs of all learners resulting in departmentalized small group work. (1.2)
 - School leaders and teachers use the recommendations from the prior year's Quality Review and thorough analysis of their data to strategize on the implementation of differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students. On a weekly data-driven differentiation day, grade-level teachers departmentalize and differentiate instruction by assigning all students to fluid small groups, thus providing them with individualized learning, including students with disabilities and English language learners.
 - Teachers discuss individual student work products focused on data to decide on effective practices they can implement in their classrooms, including asking students challenging "why" questions, which lead to student self-reflection and overall engagement in rigorous tasks. As a result, these practices provide students with individual opportunities of excelling at their own pace. Authentic student work brought back to the teacher planning sessions for further discussion leads to consistent and congruent instruction and the improvement of student achievement.
- Human resources are aligned to meet the school's instructional goals as evidenced by outcomes in academic tasks, student assessments, and work products. (1.3)
 - School instructional goals and budget constraints are at the core of the organizational decisions made by the school leaders and teachers. A consultant, a math academic intervention service provider, and staff developer, model how to work with small groups of students on specific strategies to support student learning. In addition, they work with individually assigned cohorts of students at varied times during the school day for continued academic support relative to the assessment discussions on these students' work products in literacy and math. The school schedule reflects structured block times in literacy and math, with a focus on reflective writing and critical thinking skills, thus an increase in the volume of student content writing is evident.
 - The hiring committee composed of school leaders and teachers interview candidates for vacant positions. In accordance with the school wide goals and areas of need, they collaboratively ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates to ensure that their assignments are in consonance with these goals. Additionally, teachers receive customized schedules in support of the instructional needs of student groupings, resulting in strategic interventions for academic improvement.
- Teams of teachers use data and test results to identify students' areas of strength and those in need of focus and to decide on strategic next steps. (2.2)
 - Teams of teachers collaborate and provide support to each other as they analyze classroom assessments and student work products. Academic

intervention services (AIS) teachers also provide information and feedback about their work with students, evidenced by the up-to-date AIS portfolios they maintain that include running records and formative assessments. As teachers collaboratively discuss each student, they reference this information helping them to decide on strategic next steps, resulting in improved student outcomes.

- Teachers, in tandem with a staff developer, consistently discuss models of good practice as they reflect on their work and ways in which to make it more effective. In addition, teacher meetings and data-driven differentiated sessions provide staff with opportunities to check for student understanding. Ultimately, these ongoing 'check-ins', as evidenced by team discussions and agenda minutes, and students' running records and work, serve as important indicators to teachers on the instructional adjustments needed to continue to move students forward.
- School leaders communicate high expectations to staff, students, and parents leading to a unified sense of purpose in the instructional trajectory. (3.4)
 - There is a consistent message of high expectations evident in the professional trainings provided to teachers at meetings, lab sites within the school, teacher-to-teacher support, and ongoing feedback by school leaders via instructional write-ups as they reference teachers' individual professional growth plans. The low inference tools used to support teacher growth are rigorous in nature, therefore, teachers clearly understand they are accountable towards ensuring they continue to meet expectations and strive for more.
 - Teams of teachers meet regularly to discuss expected outcomes for students. Once they agree on grade expectations regarding academics, attendance, and behavior, they share these with students, thus ensuring that the same expectations are communicated to all students via one unified message. Teachers and students engage in conversations on expectations during class meetings and how these are to translate into self-achievement. In addition, teachers send notes home to parents so they can understand their roles in support of the school and their children.
- School leaders use a research-based framework to provide teachers with meaningful and timely feedback leading to improved instructional practice and professional growth. (4.1)
 - School leaders use a research-based framework for observations to align school-wide professional development with the planning of instruction. In addition, the principal's implementation of the school's teacher tenure decision-making process includes meeting with teachers to 'map out where they are in the framework' and the development of goals for which he/she will be held accountable. This is evident in the professional development binder, teacher discussions during planning meetings, and lesson delivery. As teachers plan, observe model lessons, and participate in professional development, they are continually reflecting leading to improving their practice. School leaders conduct ongoing informal observations and meet with individual teachers in order to provide them with targeted feedback for the improvement of their lesson delivery. Teachers collect evidence of their work in binders reviewed throughout the school year. Individualized plans for

professional development are devised with teachers to provide them with the needed differentiated support to assist in the achievement of their goals, resulting in teacher growth. Simply put by principal: "It's about growth, dedication, and commitment...teachers must show evidence."

- School leaders and teachers collaboratively evaluate and adjust their curricular and instructional practices to ensure alignment to students' academic needs. (5.1)
 - There is a common thread of curricular and instructional discussions in teacher planning sessions, administrative conferences with teachers, and curriculum map sessions where all stakeholders are constantly assessing their work to ensure they are addressing areas of greatest need. The ongoing data analysis, cross conversations between classroom teachers and service providers, and administrative assessment of formal and informal observations, lead to cyclical evaluation resulting in ongoing adjustments to the work for the improvement of student achievement.
 - Teachers submit the unit assessment results to the administration for periodic 'check-ins'. School leaders use these results as a springboard to their meetings with individual teachers for in-depth discussions of students' academic progress, leading to increased teacher knowledge. In addition, professional development meetings with staff developers provide a wealth of information and next steps for support for teachers in implementing and adjusting instructional practices that support student learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Further align the curricula and academic tasks to State standards to promote awareness of 'career and college readiness across all grades. (1.1)
 - Conversations around the school wide alignment of the curriculum to the standards, which began last year, enabled school leaders and teachers to conduct a gap analysis in content area learning. They made decisions on the supports needed, such as professional development from the network's team members for school-based teachers. The school's focus on the Department of Education learning bundles in social studies and science content areas for implementation this year has led to the development of curriculum maps per grade. However, the rationale around the CCLS expectations and its connection to 'career and college readiness' has not yet extended out to creating an understanding by students, thus minimizing the impact of the standards into students' academic improvement.
 - Work analysis sheets are shared amongst teachers, thereby ensuring that all teachers, inclusive of cluster teachers, are aware of school-wide student data to plan lessons that meet the varied instructional needs of student subgroups. These analyses are used to assess whole class, small group, and grade lessons. Although small group instruction is data-driven with multiple entry points that address the variety of learners' needs, there is evidence that cognitive engagement amongst students is still not consistent.
- Engage parents in strategic academic discussions that lead to increased, consistent knowledge and understanding of the expectations of the CCLS tasks. (2.4)

- Parents participate in a variety of meetings such as school leadership team, parent teacher conferences, parent association, and workshops regarding academic expectations. Parents are aware that there are higher academic demands on their children. Some of these demands include extended writing pieces, ample homework, and projects. Once students are assessed in reading, parents meet with teachers to discuss their children's areas of progress and ones in need of focus. Thanks to the ARIS trainings as well as other academic workshops such as preparation for the English language arts and math tests, parents are now able to access and gain information on their children's progress. In addition, parents acknowledge the change in the climate of assessment of their children and the future challenges they face with schooling. However, most parents are still not adequately acquainted with the CCLS, their significance, and the impact on the intellectual preparedness of their children.
- Provide students with opportunities to develop differentiated learning goals so they become independent thinkers and connect their learning to real-world situations. (3.2)
 - Teams of teachers look at student data via periodic assessments, mid-term exams, attendance, and student work to make decisions and develop goals for students. Student data analysis sheets are collected by the administration to see the next steps needed for student academic improvement. Although teachers have established benchmarks three to four times during the school year, students do not have ownership of these goals and are unable to articulate their individual goals, impacting their progress and ultimately their mastery of the CCLS tasks for academic readiness.
- Refine your system for measuring progress towards goals to ensure academic improvement and instructional growth. (5.3)
 - Using a research-based framework for teacher development has helped align instruction to goals and student performance. The informal walkthroughs and ongoing feedback sessions with teachers also serve as leverage to measure progress over time. Lesson planning and modeling vis-à-vis strategic individualized teacher lend support for the overall attainment of school-wide goals via annual planning with check-in points. In spite of the CCLS being embedded in the curriculum, the school has not yet fully aligned learning expectations, to goals, to student performance, thus limiting improving outcomes in planning, teacher development, and student performance.
 - Teachers meet frequently to analyze student work and discuss student progress. As they analyze data, they develop instructional interim goals to meet the needs of students. This is a process that is consistent across grade levels. In addition, academic intervention services offer flexible grouping that takes place for further support. Teachers use a research-based template to place students in appropriate groupings that will address their instructional areas to focus on. There is evidence of teacher commitment and effort to a systemic process where they share and discuss students' interim goals. While they provide students with targeted strategies that will help them progress and achieve their interim goals, there is not yet a process to allow for consistent articulation of goals to students, thereby allowing for a low degree of genuine ownership hindering further student academic improvement.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: The School of International Cultures	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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