

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

New Venture School
Middle School X219

3630 THIRD AVENUE
BRONX
NY 10456

Principal: DOMINIC CIPOLLONE

Dates of review: March 22 and 23, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Jacky Grossman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

I.S. 219 New Venture School is a Middle school with 441 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 45% Black, 53% Hispanic, and 1% other students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 27% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 89.8%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Guidance supports and collaborations engage students, enable them to explore the wider world, and address their needs, reconnecting them to school. (4.4)
 - A cross-functional intervention team is a key venue for improving the lives of students with significant and urgent challenges. In addition to helping students in crisis, the team emphasizes the importance of further education. Each member of the team is responsible for developing action plans for targeted students, and team members go to extensive and profound lengths to reach students who are in need of guidance. In addition, students are counseled well during the high school application process, resulting in high levels of placement at schools of their choice.
 - The school is diligent about developing partnerships that can help them in their mission to provide real world experiences to students. For example, students speak highly of programs such as Public Color and Broadway Junior. A partnership with Connected Learning helps provide every student with a home computer, which has resulted in improved home-school communication. There are many partnerships that offer sports or the arts and provide safe haven for after school hours, keeping students connected to their learning after the school day ends. As a result, the school is reaching groups of students who were previously disconnected from school and who are now attending and attaining some success in school.
- Organizational decision making strengthens support for students and provides the structures necessary for continued school improvement. (1.3)
 - A reduction in the number of assistant principals enabled funds to be directed towards guidance and social work supports, and these staff members are bilingual, to address the growing population of Spanish speaking students and parents. The school has also invested in a comprehensive online database tool that is accessed by students, parents, and teachers, who are beginning to embrace it to track progress, course grades, and assignments. Grade teams have common preparation periods daily that are sometimes used for professional development, collaboration on curriculum, and discussing student needs. In the last two years, the school had occasion to hire several new staff members. In implementing a more rigorous hiring process that included having candidates deliver demonstration lessons, the school identified new staff who are starting to bring some innovative and rigorous practice, particularly in the sixth grade, and student work products in the sixth grade reflect increasingly rigorous expectations.
- Professional collaborations between teachers and service providers are enabling the staff to better meet the individual needs of its students. (4.2)
 - The school is beginning to use a team approach to address necessary changes in curriculum, instruction, and student outcomes. A variety of teams and committees throughout the school have nearly everyone involved in some aspect of school improvement efforts. Grade level teams are charged with examining ways to ensure that both teachers and students will be ready to meet higher standards. While some teams use an inquiry approach, other teams and committees engage in problem-solving, action planning and strategizing for student intervention.
 - The sixth grade English Language Arts teacher team engages in ongoing collaboration that is centered on student work, assessment, and improving curricular access for all students. For example, they analyzed essays the students

had written after a series of lessons, models, and scaffolds were provided. Teachers discussed the different aspects of the essays and determined areas of strength and weakness for targeted students. They then focused on introductions and conclusions as areas to revisit in their teaching. They put a plan in place to re-teach these areas and reassess students' progress. They have done similar work in reading throughout the year. Each teacher on the team plays an important role in the conversation, and colleagues are continually pushing one another to try new techniques. Sixth grade written work and reading levels have improved as a result.

- School leaders have analyzed some relevant summative data and as a result, targeted aspects of the school's overarching needs are improving steadily. (2.1)
 - The principal's analysis of school-wide data has identified critical areas for improvement throughout the school. For example, there has been a determined effort to increase attendance rates at the school and this effort has begun to show success. During this visit, attendance was 93 percent, and overall attendance rates are above 90 percent for the year, which is several points higher than at the same time last school year. Incidents are also down very sharply. Principals and superintendents suspensions are down by 40 and 60 percent, respectively. This has resulted in a calmer, more orderly school environment that is enabling students to focus more on learning.
 - Analysis of data with respect to English language learners (ELLs) and special education students has led the principal to prioritize the kinds of support these students receive. For example, he has added bilingual personnel to the staff, and introduced the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol model to teachers, who are beginning to implement this practice to better support ELLs. This technique has already increased some students' class participation. Extra supports have also been developed to address the needs of chronically truant students.

What the school needs to improve

- Implement rigorous curricula, in all content areas, to ensure that all students are benefiting from rich content that prepares them for higher education. (1.1)
 - In the vast majority of classrooms, tasks included copying notes off the board, performing calculations repeatedly, and responding to basic informational questions from a textbook. Math classes had sparse evidence of work that encouraged students to demonstrate conceptual understanding. Textbooks are considered the math curriculum and are followed systematically. In a number of rooms, including eighth grade literacy classrooms, students were drawing posters to represent figurative and literal expressions, or they were reading informational texts at levels that did not match their needs. There is no specific curriculum in place to address the large numbers of eighth graders who are reading far below grade level or evidence that students are vigorously reading and writing on a daily basis. In several classrooms, the aim and lesson plans did not match what was being taught and students struggled, when asked, to explain the purpose of what they were learning and how it related to what was learned previously. There was very little evidence throughout a majority of academic classrooms that key standards have been identified and were being reinforced. There are some incipient efforts to incorporate common core aligned tasks, but only a few sixth grade classrooms demonstrated adaptability of tasks to meet student needs. Consequently, there is an overall lack of rigor in many classrooms that is resulting in low levels of student achievement.

- In one sixth grade special education classroom and one sixth grade social studies classroom, there was evidence that teachers had planned lessons that were intended to engage all students cognitively. One math classroom also had minimal evidence that individual student needs were driving the lesson about probability. In all other classrooms, however, students were noticeably not engaged. Some students slept in class and were not attended to by the teacher. Typically, lessons were undifferentiated and lacked any connection to students' lives and experiences. During the student conversations, a number of students expressed that most days in school are not challenging and they are frequently bored. Many students' achievement levels and grades have remained stagnant over time and eighth graders express that they do not feel ready for high school.
- Develop consistent, learner-centered pedagogical practices that foster active student learning in positive classroom environments. (1.2)
 - Instruction is almost entirely teacher centered, consisting of teachers asking low level questions and the same few students responding. Disproportionate time is spent on copying instructions and the day's assignments. In several classrooms, many students never completed the "Do Now" before the lesson continued. Few lesson plans showed evidence of group activity, individual work with students, or opportunities for students to engage with one another in any form. Several lessons ended without a proper summary or assessment of the task. Group work was observed in only two classrooms, with lesson plans in only one other classroom showing evidence that it was to take place through the course of the lesson. Student interviews verified the observations that there is little hands-on activity in science class as a routine. Science classes observed did not show any evidence of methodically planned, developmental lessons. Students were confused about what was taking place. Although students were compliant in most classrooms, many were not cognitively engaged and were working towards completion rather than achievement.
- Use observation and supervisory tools and frameworks to help support improved teacher practice and promote everyone's accountability for student growth. (4.1)
 - The school has identified the Danielson Framework to support teacher development, but there has been very minimal follow through. Feedback to teachers is generic and does not help teachers refine practice. Checklists offer little guidance on raising the level of rigor, using data to drive instruction, the use of effective assessment, or skills such as questioning. They focus on broad aspects of instruction such as classroom control and student attentiveness. There is inconsistency in following up on given feedback and insufficient norming among the administrative team so that all members are not giving feedback that is of consistently high quality. There is frequently a lengthy time between the observation and the feedback, reducing the impact and limiting accountability for follow-through. Many teachers express that while administrators do try and offer feedback, they need more content-based support and a quicker turnaround. While opportunities are offered for teachers to obtain broad professional development, targeted support for teachers, at all stages of their career, is not individualized enough to ensure each teacher's continued development. Some teachers report that they feel their growth as teachers is not supported adequately.
- Develop goals at the school, grade, class and teacher team level that promote acceleration of student progress, reflect the urgent needs of the student body, and are understood by all members of the community. (3.1)

- Currently 109 of 133 eighth grade students, and 62 out of 129 seventh grade students, are identified by the school as being at-risk for being held-over. There is no specific classroom-based plan in place to help mitigate this situation and ensure increased progress towards high school readiness. There are no ongoing structures in place to engage in revision of goal setting or to make mid-course adjustments as goals are met or fallen short. Parents and teachers were uncertain of the precise goals of the school, recognizing that large numbers of students were not achieving at high levels, but unclear about the plans in place to address this situation. There has been a focus on improving the school by strengthening the sixth grade, but many eighth grade students are unprepared for the rigors of high school level work.
- Continue to develop and utilize meaningful assessment tools to help teachers deepen their focus on moving all students to higher levels of success. (2.2)
 - Many of the rubrics used focus on technical aspects rather than on depth of knowledge, content, or evidence of sophisticated thinking. A few teachers aggregate results from rubrics to make curricular modifications, but the majority of rubrics lacked larger purpose, and students interviewed struggled to explain what the categories on the rubric meant. As a result, there is confusion about what it means to do well in school. The school has been implementing a periodic assessment program, which has pointed to slight improvements in student progress, but there is little evidence that information from these assessments is used regularly in classrooms for targeted instruction. One teacher was observed taking notes on student learning while working with individual students on a challenging task. All other teachers who circulated the room did so only as a means to check on completion, rather than checking for understanding. As a result, many individual student needs are unmet.
- Develop consistent practices in the tracking of student progress and providing feedback so that teachers and have a clearer understanding of performance and next steps. (3.3)
 - A few teachers have embraced Skedula, an online tracking tool, and are finding it helpful and using it to deepen their understanding of student needs. The principal uses it to track such things as course grades by reporting period and uses this information in extensive data conversations with teachers. However, it has not yet reached its full implementation. A few teachers have dynamic systems in place for keeping track of student work, but many teachers do not track student progress in ways that can help them adjust student goals. While some students did set goals earlier in the year, there is little evidence that those goals are being tracked regularly, either by teachers or students, rendering both unclear about how to attain next steps.
 - A few teachers write meaningful comments, but most student work had either one or two words of assessment or the comments focused on student effort rather than quality and content. Most students interviewed were either unsure or incorrectly identified the areas for growth specified by their teachers. Categories on rubrics were identified as both strengths and weaknesses, but the rubrics were not user-friendly for students and they were unclear about the meaning of much of the text within them. Student portfolios were often empty or outdated, and thus did not serve as useful tools for teachers, or students, to learn from their own work. As a result, students demonstrate very little ownership of their own progress.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: I.S. 219 New Venture 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
-----------	-----------------------	----------	-------------------	----------	-------------------	-----------	-----------------------