

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

P.S. 291

Elementary School 291

**2195 ANDREWS AVENUE
BRONX
NY 10453**

Principal: CARLOS VELEZ

Dates of review: November 09, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Sarah E. Goodman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

P.S. 291 is an elementary school with 543 students from kindergarten through grade 4. The school population comprises 11% Black, 87% Hispanic, and 1% Asian students.. The student body includes 26% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 92.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The administration thoughtfully structures schedules and assignments to support instructional goals driving student progress. (1.3)
 - A rigorous principal observation process of every teacher's classroom practices in the past highlighted the need for more opportunities for student participation in differentiated activities. In response, all students are engaged in SGI (Small Group Instruction) during the day. Consultants and coaches have trained staff in effective teaching practices that build cohesive pedagogical methods throughout the school. This year, SGI, programmed to take place during period two, takes advantage of the time of day that students are most likely to be present and attentive. All teachers, paraprofessionals, coaches, and other relevant staff members, are involved in leading small groups so that every class has at least two pedagogues in the room. Students work in groups on two 25-minute engaging and tiered activities that include guided reading, independent leveled reading, and small group comprehension skills. The on-going refinement of the SGI program during regular grade team and content meetings has led to accountable collaboration among the staff, focusing on the growth of reading levels of students.
- The faculty is involved in a targeted staff development system that promotes teachers dedicated to learning. (4.1)
 - The school administration and teacher teams frequently review student data and utilize cycles of classroom observations to provide strategic feedback to teachers. The school leaders make use of this information to guide professional development sessions, mentoring plans, and teacher assignments. This process is part of building a staff culture that values continual collaborative reflection and improvement leading to a very high teacher retention rate that supports student performance and has lowered the student hold-over rate.
- The school effectively develops leadership opportunities across the faculty that builds instructional capacity. (4.3)
 - The principal's purposeful decision to build leadership capacity throughout his staff engages paraprofessionals in on-going pedagogical training and classroom teaching opportunities, thus enabling them to support individual and small group learning in special education settings. Grade level teams, that include coaches, are led by teachers who facilitate creating professional learning communities focused on building instructional coherence via on-going cycles of examining data, sharing lesson plans, and visiting each other's classrooms. A significant number of the staff who mentor Lehman College student teachers study at the City University of New York, leading to administrative licensure. In addition, the administration seeks out additional leadership professional development opportunities and frequently travels to conferences with teachers to support the turn-keying of relevant instructional information school wide.
 - Early grade math teachers, involved in the Common Core Learning Standards pilot program last year are now working to build vertical capacity throughout the school by embedding CCLS math tasks into all curriculum maps, raising the rigor of tasks students are asked to do.

- Staff create a safe and inclusive culture where students are well known by adults that support youth development and learning. (1.4)
 - o The faculty at P.S.291 work together to address the social-emotional development of every student, ensuring they come to school ready to learn. Every grade engages in book of the month activities, which unifies the school community around the reading, discussion, and written reflection of a text that examines an important theme like bullying. When a student exhibits behavioral concerns in class that are not quickly resolved, teachers contact the highly accessible guidance counselor who works with each child to find the root cause of the concerns, bringing in family members when suitable to address the issues holistically. This attention to the needs of a child in and out of school supports youth development and allows the school to maintain an atmosphere that is disciplined and free of suspensions. Particular attention paid to student attendance rates and behavior begins in the early grades and sets a tone that is ongoing throughout a student's time in the school. Kindergarten children who are absent or late receive extensive follow-up from the school and incoming kindergarten families who go through an orientation are introduced to the high expectations the school has for regular attendance. This policy has led to the school showing current year improvements in attendance when compared to last year, and the school has one of the highest attendance rates in the district. Students in many early grade classrooms also monitor their daily behavior with the help of charts on which teachers identify those students who are having great, good, or bad day, allowing for immediate feedback to parents at dismissal for needed follow-up. Upper grade students, through a peer mediation program or a reading program at a local senior center, are provided opportunities to help others. This multi-faceted approach to support students and families has created a school that is sought out by families in the district leading to a student register that is consistently at capacity.

- Teachers use data to set goals for students that inform instructional decisions and accelerate learning. (3.2)
 - o The entire faculty is engaged in a standardized system that tracks student progress in math and reading. Baseline assessments administered at the beginning of the school year determine student strengths and weaknesses and are used to generate individual student goals. Students, teachers, grade level teams, and the administration, to check student progress track reading levels and math unit tests. This data is used to tier assignments for low, medium, and high performing students as well as to inform academic intervention service groupings and guided reading lessons. School-based coaches also utilize the data to guide support of those teachers who work with targeted student sub-groups, including bilingual and students below grade level. Consequently, this has led to a drop in the number of students performing below grade level and an increase in the number of students approaching and reaching level 4 on the most recent standardized tests.

- The staff successfully partners with families and outside organizations to provide students with opportunities that support social development and celebrate academic success. (4.4)
 - o P.S. 291, known for its yearly celebrations, brings the community together. On-going professional development for staff enables them to engage students in dance and theater performances that fill the auditorium to capacity with family and friends who come to enjoy the show and show support for the technical and public speaking skills students have developed. The end of year cultural

diversity celebration, another example of a culminating event, highlights literacy based performances from each class and honors academic accomplishments of graduating fourth graders. These school rituals create a sense of pride for students and lead to the high rates of cohort graduation.

- Non-profit groups, such as Project Arts, engage students in afterschool clubs, developing social and academic skills, and include field trips to explore careers at culinary institutions. A program supported by the Lehman College/ PS 291 partnership includes an afterschool science program for grade 4 students that promotes an excitement for learning using an inquiry process to engage them in experiments. All of the students who participated last year in the program tested at or above grade level on the State science test.

What the school needs to improve

- Further develop teacher pedagogy to provide additional entry points for students that extends achievement. (1.2)
 - The faculty is involved in on-going discussions and professional development related to the Common Core Learning Standards, rigor, and data informed differentiation. High levels of student participation and cognitive engagement are present consistently during the SGI time. Many classroom teachers are successfully integrating teaching strategies across content areas that challenge students through a variety of methods including tiered assignments, accountable talk practices tied to higher order questioning, and hands on activities. However, some classrooms still rely primarily on teacher directed lessons with low-level questions and do not always provide sufficient support for English language learners, monitoring and extensions for higher achieving students, or tasks and activities that move students beyond a general level of student participation. Thus, there are limited opportunities for all students to engage in a high standard of learning throughout the day.
- Utilize on-going checks for understanding to provide frequent information to guide adjustments to instruction. (2.2)
 - Staff members consistently monitor student progress to identify strengths and needs of individuals and subgroups of students by examining periodic and summative assessments. This information is used to adjust curricular decisions and inform small group student assignments during and after school. In addition to these assessments, the teacher teams develop additional assessments and rubrics aligned to key Common Core Learning Standards. However, teachers and students do not consistently utilize these rubrics as formative tools to support student self-assessment, limiting the ability to continually guide student work towards more meaningful work products. In addition, some teachers do not have effective systems in place to monitor student understanding during the progression of a lesson, limiting the timely adjustment of instruction for greater student comprehension and growth.
- Refine task development across the subjects to ensure that students are consistently cognitively engaged. (1.1)
 - As a Common Core pilot school last year, the school looked deeply at the math curriculum and tasks in the lower grades. This year, the school is continuing the work of aligning their curriculum to the Common Core across grades and subject areas. Key standards focusing on the use of supporting details, communication skills and the use of argument are integrated in many areas, including literacy,

open-ended math tasks, and the arts, leading to a coherent curriculum. However, student portfolios and in-class assignments do not reflect consistent planning to engage students in rigorous tasks that would support them in their development of their knowledge base and skill development.

- Broaden the process of evaluating and adjusting instructional practice to continue to build coherence between what is taught and how it is taught. (5.1)
 - o The administration has developed a number of exceptional systems to evaluate student progress and adjust plans. Through a school-wide “Curriculum Diary Protocol” individual and teams of teachers look at student data and student work to reflect and refine curriculum maps in light of the Common Core Learning Standards. However, while the process effectively drives curricular changes, it does not fully integrate a reflection of effective teaching strategies, including the use of formative assessment rubrics with older students, therefore limiting consistent student engagement in learning and self-monitoring.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: P.S. 291	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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