

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

John D. Wells

Middle School 50

K050

183 South 3rd Street

Brooklyn

NY 11211

Principal: Denise Jamison

Dates of review: November 27-28, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Alicja Winnicki

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

J.H.S. 050 John D. Wells is a/an Junior High-Intermediate-Middle school with 413 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 15.5% Black, 82.3% Hispanic, 0.5% White, and 1.5% Asian students. The student body includes 24.0% English language learners and 24.7% special education students. Boys account for 58.4% of the students enrolled and girls account for 41.6%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 87.03%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and teachers make purposeful decisions to emphasize Common Core Learning Standards and to provide opportunities for all students to experience CCLS-aligned units of study. (1.1)
 - A review of curriculum artifacts reveals the alignment of units of study in English language arts (ELA) and math to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). The maps reflect school emphasis on key standards such as informational text and text complexity in literacy and ratios and proportional relationships, and expressions and equations in math. Some of these maps are annotated by teachers. Most of them include pacing calendars, skills, and academic vocabulary. Teachers across grade levels use literacy and math instructional units of study from the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) website as guidelines for their curriculum maps. For example, a grade 6 unit of study, Technology in Education, is also integrated in the art unit plans with a goal of increasing literacy in art by reading and responding to the writing of Martin Luther King, Jr. Furthermore, thematic unit maps are developed by science and social studies teachers, in collaboration with English language arts teachers. These interdisciplinary units of study follow the guidelines from the Common Core Curriculum Maps resource for grades 6-8. As a result, the majority of teachers plan and implement the CCLS aligned instructional units of study designed to develop students' skills in citing textual evidence in informational text and problem solving.
 - Essential questions are included for every instructional unit of study across grade levels. Furthermore, curriculum maps, individual lesson plans and learning objectives list higher order skills, such as: analyze, summarize, solve, identify author's opinion, define and evaluate. In addition, instructional units of study in literacy are translated into Spanish on each grade level ensuring the same level of academic rigor planned in English language arts and Native language arts classes. Moreover, lesson plans of English as a Second Language teachers reveal alignment with the instructional units of study and strategies for teaching aforementioned skills. Therefore, all students, including English language learners in general education and bilingual classes, are provided with an opportunity to experience standards based curriculum.
- The school has generated a short list of goals driven by school-wide data in order to improve overall student academic achievement. (3.1)
 - The school has clearly defined four goals for improvement this academic year: two are to increase the student academic achievement in English language arts and math, one focuses on establishing teacher teams and one emphasizes the implementation of the Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS) program. Action plans for each goal are detailed and encompass strategies like periodic assessments, real-life problem solving, and incentives for students and professional development for

teachers. School goals are prominently posted as a graphic organizer called, "MS 50 2012-2013 Action Plan at a Glance". They are based on the last year's data analysis which revealed the need for academic improvement and increased support for the development of socio-emotional skills and strategies for the students. School leaders use different outlets to communicate school goals and improvement plans with the school community. In addition to faculty conferences and weekly grade and department meetings, the principal publishes her weekly newsletter to teachers where she writes about the expectations. Parents receive a newsletter, *The Link, MS 50 Connecting Home and School*. It is periodically sent to families and contains information about current school events and policies, in addition to this year's initiatives such as school-wide advisory. *The Link* shares the importance of attendance and strategies to improve student lateness, among other topics. Additionally, students set academic and personal goals with their teachers. "We want to make sure everything we do is related to our goals", says the principal. Parents summarize this year's targets as "to improve test scores so more students can pass the state tests". As a result, teachers, students, and families agree that there is collaboration to improve the school tone and raise student academic achievement. They are informed about school plans and processes for advancing overall student success. In addition, there is increased understanding of their contribution to meeting the school goals.

- The school tone and culture are inclusive and structures support meeting socio-emotional needs of diverse students. (1.4)
 - Parents, students, and teachers describe the school culture this year as improved. Students appreciate their teachers for their respect and commitment. Parents state the school is safer than last year and believe the faculty is dedicated and accessible to families. Teachers make themselves available to stay after school hours to offer assistance in academic and socio-emotional needs as all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, shared during the large group meeting. Additionally, the school is making an effort to give students more voice by surveying them about freedom of expression, engagement in class discussions, and suggestions of topics of interest, particularly in an advisory program. Surveys revealed that 77% of students feel the advisors give them opportunities to freely talk about issues and concerns. As one student said, "I like to express myself. Sometimes I even teach my class." As a result, diverse students are appreciated and included in building school culture and their voices are welcomed and valued.
 - Implementation of the Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) program has allowed the school to better communicate strategies for conflict resolution with students. The faculty and staff show commitment in the areas of youth development and socio-emotional learning. Several guidance counselors and two deans plan weekly activities for small group of students. Furthermore, the majority of students in grades 6-8, including all students with disabilities, participate in the newly established advisory program taught by guidance counselors and focused on discussing difficult issues such as bullying. As seen in a school-made video, students

are given an opportunity to engage in role playing and discussions. Additionally, teachers and staff members, including secretaries and school aides, award students with C.A.R.E. cards for good behavior and class participation and many adults wear the C.A.R.E. badges throughout the school day. C.A.R.E., which stands for be Considerate, Accountable, Respectful, and show Excellence, is a component of the PBIS program. As a result, students are motivated to change their behavior and are developing an ability to self-regulation which is evident in the fifty percent decrease in superintendent's suspensions for the same period of time as compared to last year according to the November 2012 Online Occurrence Reporting System generated by the Office of Safety and Youth Development.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve instructional practices across classrooms to ensure that diverse students are consistently provided with multiple entry points and challenging tasks enabling them to demonstrate higher order thinking skills. (1.2)
 - The school leaders have an expectation that teachers across grade levels ask open-ended questions, use scaffolding strategies and group students flexibly to meet their identified learning needs. The principal states "it is work in progress". In most classes, teachers are beginning to focus on higher order skills by including them in lesson objectives but they usually ask students simple and general questions during instruction. Similarly, scaffolding was evident but not embedded in lessons to ensure that English language learners, students with disabilities or higher achieving students had an opportunity to access and advance their learning. For example, most English language arts teachers across grade levels used a strategy of numbering paragraphs of complex text to facilitate citing textual evidence. However, adjustments such as adding a graphic organizer implemented in some classes, were insufficient to meet the learning needs or styles of diverse students. Moreover, in one bilingual math class students passively received instruction in English and beginner English language learners were provided with minimal support necessary to access new information. In another classroom, students who finished their work early stated they had to wait for the rest of the class or help those that were still working. They were provided with additional practice worksheets as extensions to their tasks, thus limiting richer opportunities for the students to accelerate their learning. Likewise, teachers in most classes attempted to implement flexible grouping but most students worked on the same tasks. Consequently, inconsistent planning for multiple entry points and challenging tasks, especially for English language learners and high achievers, hinders student academic progress across all content areas.

- Develop consistency in the use of data from on-going formative assessments, aligned to curricula, to inform timely adjustments to lesson and unit plans in order to accelerate student learning and meet the needs of all students. (2.2)
 - The school maintains an assessment binder that is a collection of student achievement data from last year's state tests and includes class sets of

running records in reading and lists of English language learners and students with disabilities. This data is presented to teachers in a form of graphic organizers and item skills analysis during weekly inquiry time and there is some evidence that teachers are using it to inform how they group students. Grade level teacher teams are beginning to use common formative assessments, such as a pre-test in math, to identify skills and areas for academic improvement and literacy teachers across grade levels make an effort to use 4 point rubrics that are becoming aligned with key standards. There was little evidence, however, that those teachers collaboratively create rubrics or other forms of formative assessments. As one teacher said, she gets rubrics from on-line resources and websites. Although rubrics are posted next to student published work in writing, teacher feedback in most cases is general, not rubric specific, thus not providing students with next steps and strategies to achieve grade level and standards based benchmarks. Consequently, the absence of school-wide systems for providing actionable feedback to students limits teachers' ability to track progress and make effective instructional adjustments that meet students' learning needs.

- Use teacher observation data to design professional development that addresses identified teachers' needs and provides support for the improvement of instructional practices. (4.1)
 - The first cycle of short feedback observations, focused on classroom environment, has been completed and the majority of teachers were observed at least once by one of the administrators who provided feedback in a form of a checklist based on the Danielson's *Framework for Teaching*. This is a new framework the school leaders started using this year for short feedback observations that are scheduled for 3-4 cycles and are posted for the teachers. Sample feedback observation reports include comments focusing on attributes related to the classroom environment listed in Domain 2 of the *Framework*. The principal and assistant principals support teacher development by adding comments about student engagement or suggestions about changes in physical classroom layout conducive to conducting on-going formative assessment. Although feedback to teachers captures some instructional strengths, it includes areas for improvement and next steps mostly for classroom environment and managing student behavior, thus preventing teacher improvement in questioning and discussion. Meetings with teachers and the school leadership revealed that there is a need for building common language around teacher development and shared understanding of the *Framework*. School leaders, after a consultation with their network, have changed the initial feedback form by eliminating ratings for each element. Furthermore, the principal and two assistant principals have participated in workshops offered by their network and are planning on using the observation data for professional development in other areas of the *Framework* as indicated on the math department calendar. However, individual teachers' needs are yet to be met. Consequently, teachers' ability to improve their own practice is limited and acceleration of student learning is hampered.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name:	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score		X					
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?		X					
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?		X					
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?		X					
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?		X					
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?		X					
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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					
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?		X					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed