

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**I.S. 096 Seth Low**

**Junior High-Intermediate-Middle**

**99 AVENUE P  
BROOKLYN  
NY, 11204**

**Principal: Denise Sandra Levinsky**

**Dates of review: Oct 25, 2012  
Lead Reviewer: Isabel DiMola**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

I.S. 096 Seth Low is a Junior High-Intermediate-Middle school with 759 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 13.2% Black, 29.5% Hispanic, 24.1% White, and 32.8% Asian students. The student body includes 18.3% English language learners and 18.4% special education students. Boys account for 53.9% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46.1%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 92.53%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders make effective decisions around use of resources and school organization to ensure that they are providing students with opportunities to meet and exceed instructional goals. (1.3)
  - Effective evaluation of student data allows leaders to make strategic use of financial resources to address the needs of a diverse population of students. In analyzing subgroup performance indicators of a variety of student groups with a focus on special needs students and English language learners, the data indicated that there is a need for methods of instruction that target improving proficiency in comprehension and student writing. The investment in Writing Matters provides resources and support so struggling students can have access to targeted instruction that meets their individual needs. Students participating in the program demonstrate work products in their portfolios that show continual improvement toward reaching learning targets. Forty-four percent of these students showed significant progress in scores on the New York State English Language Arts Exam with seventy-five percent of special needs students and forty percent of English language learners making substantial gains. Consequently, leadership is expanding the use of the program in the school, allocating resources to train more teachers in the program's methodology thereby increasing the number of students engaging in the strategies and improving their overall writing and comprehension skills.
  - An academy structure provides opportunities for supervisors, teachers and support staff to deeply focus on a manageable number of students and be accountable for their progress. School leaders use student performance data, academy interest, experience and preference to assign teachers to academies and classes. Most teachers teach in one academy where they share responsibility for students with other academy teachers, and meet at least twice weekly to address student academic and social-emotional needs. This structure also provides for one dean and family assistant per academy. Push-in and pullout structures allow for special needs students, English language learners and other targeted students to receive services that address their needs. Teachers are able to collaborate deeply with regard to individual and groups of students, closely monitor student progress and plan interventions to immediately address student learning. This results in opportunities for accelerated progress as evidenced by student writing pieces in the humanities that incorporate cross content learning over several weeks and vocabulary development that aligns to the Middle School Quality Initiative and are representative of challenging academic tasks teachers are providing as seen in student portfolios.
- The school culture is collaborative, supportive and caring of student social-emotional needs resulting in an environment that is safe and conducive to high levels of learning. (1.4)
  - The principal makes it a priority to maintain a positive environment that is supportive of students and their families. Every student has a teacher mentor who is responsible for communicating with the student and family areas of concern and to ensure that the administration knows of any circumstances students may have that are interfering with success. Students report, "Mentors make sure we are okay, help us if we struggle and let us know that they are there for us. Sometimes we need to know they care about us, not just how we do and that's what the mentor does." The family assistants assigned to the academies are the point people for students and families to communicate with the school. They work with at risk students, develop individual attendance plans and monitor social-emotional goals. If there are concerns, the family assistant communicates with leadership and families. Parents feel that they are extremely engaged by the school and have opportunities to be partners in their children's education. The school uses a computer program that gives parents access to student grades, homework, teacher comment and daily attendance. Every student has a computer to take home and assistance with internet access so that there is access to the program for every family. Teachers engage in professional development to expand their effectiveness in addressing the social-emotional needs of students.

For example, teachers are engaging in learning around research based strategies to support positive behavior interventions, how to effectively use the ladder of referral and ways to make students feel accountable for their behavior. Partnerships with community-based organizations provide after-school programs that offer enrichment as well as academic and social interventions. As a result, there has been a 50% decrease in the number of teacher referrals to deans for classroom behavior issues, a 51% majority reduction in the number of reported incidents when comparing September 2011 to September 2012. The overall student attendance has increased as well as the attendance for targeted student sub-groups. Consequently, students feel supported, feel the school is a safe place where, "We can concentrate on our learning and be ready for when we go to high school."

- Across classrooms teachers use assessments to understand student progress and adjust curriculum and instructional decisions to support student growth toward reaching the school's key standards. (2.2)
  - Teachers use a plethora of data to understand student learning and adjust practice in individual classrooms and across the school as indicated by common assessment outcomes. As a school involved in the Middle School Quality Initiative, students are assessed using the DRP method with running records taken at specific intervals to monitor student progress toward reaching benchmarked goals. To supplement this data, some students engage in Achieve 3000 that immediately assesses and provides feedback about progress on specific strands of the standards. In addition, teacher made assessments, ongoing checks for understanding during lessons and tasks graded using rubrics that are content specific and align to Common Core Learning Standards provide data toward understanding the effectiveness of teaching practices on student learning. A uniform grading policy articulates weights of class work, participation, homework, exams and portfolios so there is consistency in student grading and clarity around progress of individuals and the school toward reaching benchmarks. Teachers provide effective feedback to students. Consequently, students articulate understanding their next steps to continue to make progress toward reaching and exceeding standards. As a result, teachers are able to articulate why they are using specific pedagogical strategies to address individualized needs and formative assessments across classes show that a majority of students are making progress toward reaching learning goals.
- School leaders and faculty have high expectations for students and communicate effectively with parents so that there are multiple opportunities for families to be active partners toward improving student outcomes. (3.4)
  - The principal is very strong in articulating high expectations for all members of the school faculty and staff, through regular faculty conferences, principal communications and individual and team conversations and discussions. Professional development for all members of the faculty, including supervisors, teachers and support staff continually raises the bar for the level of work expected by adults and students at the school. Faculty receives comprehensive support in building pedagogic skill around questioning, imbedding technology and vocabulary development to expand teacher capacity in offering high level, engaging instruction that motivates students and sets the highest expectations. Conference notes, unit and lesson plans, supervisor feedback and student work products all demonstrate that the culture of the school promotes a belief that whatever a students' level, they are supported in moving forward. As a result, the school is a strong professional community that strives to elevate its practice and uses student outcomes to better understand the effectiveness of instruction and address specific needs so students continually improve.
  - School leaders, teachers, students and families create a true partnership to hold every student to high standards and ensure that each has a clear path toward achieving learning goals. Parents report that they are "overwhelmed by the amount of communication and conversation" with faculty and staff about their individual students. Every student and family participates in creating learning goals that align to individual needs. An online system provides families with information about student performance allowing parents to engage teachers in ongoing conversation about progress. Career and college readiness is at the forefront of communication and supports provided to students and families at the school. The academy structure provides students with opportunities to take elective courses that align to student interest.

Parents feel that the school "understands their passion and puts students on a trajectory to live their dreams." Beginning in the sixth grade students and families understand what it takes to succeed in high school and have opportunities to collaborate with the school and community organizations to go on trips to in and out of state universities. Students recognize what they need to do to be successful at the next level. Students report that the school is, "serious about getting us where we want to be" and "because they believe in us we believe in ourselves." As a result, there is an increase in the number of students registering for high school level and advanced classes, taking preparatory courses for specialized high schools and participating in extended day activities that support college and career readiness. This is leading to improving scholarship for many students and an enthusiasm among them for the next stages of their learning.

## What the school needs to improve

- Deepen the curricula across all grades and subject areas to ensure that all students have opportunities to participate in highly engaging, rigorous instruction that promotes higher order thinking. (1.1)
  - The school is working toward aligning curricula with the Common Core Learning Standards, emphasizing key umbrella strands in English language arts and math. There is a focus on designing curriculum that embeds literacy and writing skills across content areas. However, it does not yet provide consistent scaffolding with entry points for all learners including students with special needs, English language learners and high achieving students. Instruction in the content areas as depicted in curriculum maps and units of study are in different places in the level of rigor, resulting in tasks that do not provide even access to highly engaging, cognitively challenging work for all students and limiting opportunities for deep learning.
- Extend instructional practices so all classes are representative of the school's instructional vision and all learners have opportunities to access content resulting in work products that demonstrate mastery of the standards. (1.2)
  - Although curriculum work is beginning to align instructional expectations to the Common Core Learning Standards and regularly scheduled time for teacher teams facilitates the creation of tasks that align to the standards, there is a gap in practice limiting opportunities for students to demonstrate higher order thinking and achievement of learning goals. Supervisors are raising the bar for instructional practices to ensure that all students are engaging in tasks that build critical thinking skills however, the alignment between expectations and instructional practice is uneven throughout the school. Some tasks and assignments are beginning to align to Depth of Knowledge scales, though pedagogy in some classes is just beginning to demonstrate teaching strategies that support questioning and opportunities for higher order thinking for all students and sub-groups of students. As a result, there are gaps in teaching methodologies that correlate to student learning leading to missed opportunities to engage some students at the highest of levels.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: I.S. 096 Seth Low	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			X				
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<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				
<b>School Culture</b>							
<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			
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<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 <b>inquiry approach</b> 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				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed