

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Alexine A. Fenty

K139

**330 Rugby Road
Brooklyn 11226**

Principal: Mary McDonald

Dates of review: March 8-9, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Dr. Rhonda Dawn Farkas

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Alexine A. Fenty is an elementary school with 1,065 students from pre-k through grade 5. The school population comprises 36% Black, 35% Hispanic, 11% White, and 18% Asian students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 95.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders support and track progress of teachers' development from the strategic use of targeted and frequent cycles of classroom visits and feedback to elevate adult learning. (4.1)
 - The principal and assistant principals use low inference, focused observations and walkthroughs that are aligned to a research-based framework and include normed, specific, and actionable feedback provided to teachers. These feedback loops, which capture teachers' strengths, provide a clear portrait of actionable next steps for teachers to further develop their pedagogy and advance specific plans of actions to improve their practice. Supervisors communicate the feedback loops electronically that include prior feedback rounds as well as teachers' reflections. This coherent feedback system enables teachers to monitor their own effectiveness and track their own progression along the continuum. Additionally, it provides a structure for supervisors to analyze classroom practices across the school, engage in recursive feedback conversations, and support effective and cohesive teaching practices across classrooms. School leaders color code teachers' strengths and areas in need of further development, enabling them to quickly identify trends to inform their professional development plans. They categorize teachers' level of effectiveness using a rubric and provide clear trajectories for growth using their data, feedback history, and next steps. This ongoing focused observation practice has led to improved instructional changes as noted in teacher effectiveness as well as in student data. Consequently, 70%, 82%, and 90% of teachers demonstrated growth in the areas of planning and preparation, designing assessments, and questioning and discussion techniques, respectively, since the beginning of the school year. Furthermore, careful analysis of Fountas and Pinnell independent reading levels in grades k-5 reveals growth of all students, including relevant subgroups. For example, in grades 3-5, respectively, 56%, 30%, and 25% of English language learners (ELLs) have made significant progress as revealed by the most recent Fountas and Pinnell benchmarks as compared to the baseline administered in the beginning of the year. Similarly, using the same formative assessment, 50%, 25%, and 30% of grade 3-5 students with disabilities (SWDs) have progressed.
- The principal makes strategic decisions to support the school's instructional goals that result in collective responsibility of teachers for meeting students' learning needs.(1.3)
 - All school leaders articulate clear rationales and goals for the school's investments of funding sources. In addition to hiring a full time guidance counselor, opening a self-contained ELL class in kindergarten and a Reading Plus lab, where students work to increase their reading progress in fluency and comprehension, school leaders programmed teacher teams to meet a minimum of two times each week and, as part of a School Based Option (SBO) vote, teachers additionally work collaboratively on Thursday afternoons to analyze student work and/or to align curriculum units with the Common Core Learning Standard (CCLS). Teams effectively led by teachers and/or literacy and math coaches use protocols from the National School Reform Faculty to focus on developing

lessons that target skills as necessitated by the CCLS and carefully analyzing student work to determine and make essential adjustments in instruction. The principal also hired AUSSIE consultants to work with teachers on employing the instructional shifts in the areas of English language arts (ELA) and math and enlists the aid of the Network's English as a Second Language support specialist to visit classrooms, model lessons, and plan and design instruction that provide scaffolds and supports to meet the needs of the ELL subgroup. Moreover, teachers use Smart Boards during instruction to implement principles of the Universal Design for Learning to complement their lessons. As a result of this deliberate structuring of human resources and configured time for collaborative planning, teachers clearly articulate the work of their grade and how their planning has impacted classroom practice and student learning outcomes as demonstrated by higher rubric ratings on student writing products, improved scores on unit assessments, and increased reading levels. These strategic initiatives have resulted in teachers across the school frontloading academic vocabulary and embedding key skills revealed from student data within lessons to meet the needs of all learners. This is demonstrated by increased quality of writing by ELLs and SWDs across content areas as well as improved scores of these subgroups on unit assessments. Notably, parents articulated that they are well versed with the curricula offered and how they link to the stages of their child's development as they advance through the grades.

- School leaders and teachers align assessments to key standards and tasks and use ongoing checks for understanding to make adjustments to lessons and curriculum at the team and classroom levels. (2.2)

The school's faculty, in collaboration with administrators, utilizes a range of common assessments and student performance data that include Acuity periodic assessments and benchmark assessments in literacy and unit assessments in math to inform lesson planning to determine student progress toward goals across grades. Teachers also use a variety of means for checking for understanding, including conferring with students, analyzing student written work products, spoken language, and on performance tasks. In addition, they use a common ongoing check for understanding template to monitor student understanding and make effective adjustments to meet their students' varied learning needs. These checklist tools, coupled with rubrics that are used for various tasks consistently used across the school, facilitate teachers' tracking of student development, gauge students' understanding of concepts during a lesson, determine the effectiveness of their instruction, and enable them to make immediate adjustments to meet the needs of their diverse learners. Moreover, students' self-assess using hand signals such as thumbs up, thumbs sideways, and thumbs down to indicate understanding, confusion, or misunderstandings. In addition, they submit written reflections about what they have read, researched, or learned, which are used as exit slips, to provide a clear vision of student mastery across the spectrum of proficiency levels. Thus, these wide-ranging tools aid teachers' instruction and provide them with a clear, rigorous, and standardized grading system for accurately evaluating student work products.

- School systems and partnerships consistently communicate high expectations to the staff and families for learning and provide supports to achieve them. (3.4)
 - The principal, with the support of her cabinet, provides well-defined expectations for professionalism, instruction, and communication to all constituencies in various forms such as Faculty Conference notes, a staff handbook designed by and for the staff, the school website, quarterly parent newsletters, teachers' progress reports, email communiqués, and monthly parent association and school leadership team meetings. These expectations support the school's infrastructures as well as convey a shared, consistent vision of what students should know and be able to do. Results of last year's Progress Report and the school's learning environment survey framed this year's practices around consistent high expectations for teachers, students, and parents. Individual conferences and feedback sessions are also held with each teacher to review professional goals and identify patterns that impact teaching and learning. A relentless focus on closing the achievement gap for English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs) has resulted in intensive levels of targeted instruction, including push-in support by the grade-appropriate assistant principal, to address the needs of individual students. As part of the constructive home-school partnerships established, two of the ELL parents assist the parent coordinator in guiding and enriching parents' familiarity with the computer and provide translation for those whose primary language is other than English. These sessions, held twice a week for six to eight weeks, acquaint parents with navigating ARIS, the Common Core library, and pertinent educational websites to support their children at home. Additionally, school and Network support personnel provide training on the school's common teaching framework, which ensures teachers understand the components of the research-based measure used to gauge their effectiveness. Network support and school leaders also plan for and implement trainings throughout the year that build a shared understanding of what effective teaching looks like in all classrooms. Furthermore, school leaders' emphases on grading, attendance, and lateness policies, as well as behavioral expectations centered on "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Kids," is accompanied by teaching resources, websites, hyperlinks, and videos to support the school's professional development objectives, in connection with citywide instructional priorities.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine lesson level questions to stimulate higher-order thinking, promote rigor, and ensure cognitive engagement of all learners to elevate student learning and work products. (1.1)
 - In some classrooms, teachers provide students with clear learning targets and success criteria, aligning their questions to academic tasks that require students to examine their own data and create their own learning goals, and allow for self- and peer-assessment, for students to think meta-cognitively and to develop understanding of effective learning

tactics. Teachers create curriculum units that are aligned with the CCLS and are replete with topics, timelines, resources, teaching points, mentor texts, and illustrations of practical anchor charts. However, despite the growth in teacher questioning identified by data gleaned from formal and informal observations, teachers' use of questions to stimulate critical thought, invite students to formulate hypotheses, challenge previously held views, and encourage students to use text-based evidence to support their stance are uneven across classrooms. Consequently, opportunities to encourage varied level learners, including the school's relevant subgroups and high-level learners to demonstrate their thinking, make connections among concepts, arrive at new understandings of cognitively complex material, and formulate their own questions to pose to their teachers and peers, are hampered.

- Improve consistency of classroom instruction to ensure that all teachers provide multiple access points for all students to improve learning outcomes. (1.2)
 - Teachers at the school are exceptionally dedicated to ensuring they continuously develop their teaching skills and content knowledge to afford their students engaging educational experiences, including various arts that are aligned with the CCLS and develop units of study, pacing plans, and benchmarks to support learning. This year, the school has embarked upon the CAFÉ system, an acronym for Comprehension, Accuracy, Fluency, and Expanding vocabulary, which is based on research into the habits of proficient readers. As a result of this initiative, teachers are organizing assessment data and tracking each child's strengths and goals. Additionally, they frontload the academic vocabulary to support students' acquisition of content. As a result, in many classrooms, students are producing rigorous, high-quality work that meets them at their specific access points, a common feature of teaching and learning emphasized in the school's overall curricular expectations. However, observable evidence that teachers are addressing and supporting the strengths and learning needs of children with varying levels, including SWDs, ELLs, and high-level learners, by adapting, modifying, or scaffolding lessons to support them are uneven across classrooms, thus, hindering consistently high levels of student thinking and work products.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Alexine A. Fenty	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