

# **Quality Review Report 2012-2013**

**Kensington**

**Elementary 179**

**202 AVENUE C  
BROOKLYN  
NY, 11218**

**Principal: Bernadette Amato**

**Dates of review: April 29 - 30, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Gonzalez**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Kensington is an elementary school with 966 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 4% Black, 31% Hispanic, 19% White, and 45% Asian students. The student body includes 41% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 94.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is Proficient.**

### What the school does well

- The school leader and teachers design engaging, coherent curricula across content areas, aligned to key standards with rigorous academic tasks that cognitively engage all learners and . (1.1)
  - The units of study in math, English language arts, science, and social studies, across grades include lessons that address reading, writing, listening and speaking standards, content language development, increased text complexity and informational reading and writing. The guiding essential questions and performance tasks serve as assessments for determining progress through units and provide a variety of ways for students to demonstrate their learning such as written reflections on their work, interdisciplinary arts projects, and group presentations. Across content areas, it is also clear that teachers have the resources and strategies to adapt curriculum and tasks, providing multiple entry points to support all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities as evidenced by specific language objectives and strategies units ensuring scaffolds for academic vocabulary development. Throughout the units of study in English language arts, students are expected to cite evidence from texts when writing responses to reading, analyze characters, and make inferences. In math, students are required to provide the strategies for solving problems create or draw models to demonstrate their thinking, and use math vocabulary to explain their solutions. Specifically, a unit in English language arts required students to use research skills to gather information about healthy eating and nutritious value of food, present factual information, use content language, and form an argument. The resulting task was a persuasive letter to the principal asking for healthier snacks in the cafeteria for lower grade students, thus the unit was relevant and timely and allowed students to integrate reading and writing and critical thinking skills into a real world scenario. As a result of the well-planned curricula units and the development of tasks that demand use of content language across grades and subjects, students are engaged in learning experiences that reflect the rigor and demand of the CCLS and ensure the development of their critical thinking skills.
- The school uses resources effectively, resulting in strengthened teacher capacity and improved instruction as evidenced by student engagement and meaningful work products. (1.3)
  - One teacher per grade has been designated as the instructional lead in order to provide support to colleagues in the implementation of the CCLS and the incorporation of the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE), improving teacher practice. These teachers serve as grade level team leaders for structured weekly meetings, which include common planning, inquiry, and analysis of student work. They also provide lab site professional development by modeling instructional strategies in their classrooms, which are often visited by colleagues as an outgrowth of administrators or teachers suggestions, thus promoting professional growth. In addition the school works closely with its network support team to provide support and training in instructional strategies such as differentiation, academic language development for English language learners, and the use of the Danielson framework as a tool to improve teaching and learning. Two assistant principals are assigned to lower elementary, one each to pre-kindergarten through grade 2, and upper elementary grades, grades 3 through 5, respectively, to provide focused support and supervision of

teachers. During structured teacher team meetings, assistant principals check in thus ensuring continuity of practice and alignment of their work to school goals for increased student achievement. The administration's effective use of teachers and administrators and collaborative meeting time has resulted in improved pedagogy as evidenced by all the use of effective scaffolds and instructional strategies to support content language development resulting in increased use of academic language by students in discussions and in writing.

- The administration strategically uses data from observations of teacher practice, based on a research-based framework, to support teacher growth by providing actionable feedback that elevates pedagogy and improves student learning. (4.1)
  - Observations of teachers, both formal and informal, are based on the Danielson framework competencies of designing coherent instruction, establishing a culture for leaning and questioning and discussion techniques. The feedback cycle involves a visit from one administrator, clear and actionable written next steps for improving a particular teaching strategy such as wait time after questioning, or monitoring partner talk, and a follow-up visit to determine growth. A review of teacher observation reports indicate that administrators' detailed feedback to teachers captures teachers' strengths and provides support and clear examples for improvement. Teachers state that the feedback is ongoing and meaningful since it is connected to their professional goals and that the use of the framework has enabled them to give more ownership of the learning to the students. Specifically, professional goals reflect teachers' self-selected areas for growth, and are aligned to the framework at the beginning of the year and provide a focus for strengthening practice. New teachers feel supported by administrators and colleagues alike and describe mentoring and coaching supports, which are provided by experienced colleagues and includes modeling of effective instructional strategies, as extremely helpful. As a result of the targeted use of the research based framework and structures for professional development, teachers are self reflective and pedagogy has improved across the school as evidenced by teachers' effective use facilitation and questioning techniques across grades and subject areas.
- Across grades, teacher teamwork is effectively focused on the analysis of student work and classroom practice resulting in improved instruction and academic progress towards goals for students. (4.2)
  - Teachers meet two times a week with grade level colleagues and once a week after school with vertical inquiry teams to discuss student work and how it reflects the expectations of the CCLS, to engage in data analysis, to identify learning needs, and to make decisions about necessary adjustments to their teaching or to academic tasks for students. A clear focus across the school is vocabulary and academic language development, given the high numbers of current and former English language learners. Teachers review student work and assess writing using standards-based rubrics. If needed, rubrics are revised to ensure proper alignment to tasks and grade level expectations as evidenced by one team that determined the language of the rubric was unclear and that students would not be able to distinguish the expectations between performance levels. In addition to discussing trends of strength in student work, teachers also discuss instructional strategies such as increased modeling and use of pictorial supports, and get feedback from colleagues about possible adjustments to further support student learning. These focused meetings have resulted in improved practice, specifically the targeted teaching of literacy skills and improved student learning as evidenced by an increase of 21% of grade 3 through 5 students

performing at Tier 3 on spring benchmark reading assessments, and an 8% increase of grade 2 students reading at grade level.

## What the school needs to improve

- Enhance instruction across subject areas to ensure teachers strategically provide higher quality supports and scaffolds in lessons to engage students in high levels of discussion, increasing student ownership of learning. (1.2)
  - Teachers use specific scaffolds for developing content language such as introducing new vocabulary at beginning of mini lessons, and provide support for all students so that they can engage confidently in tasks that include new vocabulary. Mini-lessons provide students with explicit opportunities to distinguish Tier 1, basic everyday words, Tier 2, "tricky" or multiple meaning words, and Tier 3, domain specific words. This practice is evidenced across subject areas as well as the "turn and talk" strategy requiring students to engage in content level discussions and reflect on their understanding of new concepts. The use of higher order questions probing students to justify answers and cite text based is evident across classrooms and grades and lessons and include Webb's Depth of Knowledge levels to move students to critical thinking and discussion. Most teachers provide visual models of new concepts and are very precise about language use. However, there are missed opportunities in a few classes to support higher achieving students with tasks or questions that extend their learning. In classes where there are many students with disabilities, the pacing of lessons and introduction of new language is sometimes inconsistent with students' learning needs. For example in one math class the teacher used several math terms in a lesson on measurement while demonstrating a task but did not pause to ensure that all students were comprehending the new words. Therefore, the acceleration of learning for some students is hindered.
- Improve the implementation of assessment strategies so that adjustments to instruction include timely supports and extensions that effectively meet diverse students' needs. (2.2)
  - Teams and individual teachers create standards-based rubrics and checklists that are used to assess student work. Students use the rubrics to self-assess and pre-determine their level of performance based on their own evaluation of completed tasks. Teachers provide meaningful feedback and clear next steps for students who are able to articulate what they need to do to improve their performance. For example, one second grade student said that her writing is more fluid now because she listened to teacher feedback. Instead of using linking words such as "and" or "because", she uses "foremost, additionally, and finally," as it makes her writing more interesting. A fifth grade student said he needs to focus on providing more detail in his writing. Although teachers have effective ways of providing students with feedback on written tasks and assessments, and most teachers monitor partner talk to check for student understanding, some lessons do not include opportunities for students to articulate their learning. For example, in one class, after a mini-lesson, students are sent to group work but some still grapple with instructions for the task, reducing learning time and requiring teacher support and repetition. Similarly, students that are advanced in their understanding work on tasks that may be easy for them. Thus, inconsistent checks for understanding limit teachers' ability to make timely and effective adjustments to meet students' targeted needs.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Kensington	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			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 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				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>