

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Morris H. Weiss

Elementary School 215

**414 Avenue S
Brooklyn, New York**

NY 11223

**Principal:
Antonella Bove**

Dates of review: December 11 - 12, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Leslie Miller Chislett

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Morris H. Weiss is an elementary school with 769 students from pre-k through grade 5. The school population comprises 3% Black, 26% Hispanic, 50% White, and 19% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 94%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is Proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders create a strong learning environment that promotes trust and collaboration and supports academic and personal growth of students and adults. (1.4)
 - Leadership clearly articulates a philosophy that children and adults need to feel accepted and part of a school family in order to grow. Thus a safe and inclusive climate drives social and emotional supports to both students and parents. Parents express appreciation that they can count on open access to leadership, teachers, or other parents, who work with them to resolve their needs in a timely, non-judgmental, compassionate fashion. Effective communication channels and structures exist between office staff, parent leadership, school cabinet, the pupil personnel committee, and teachers, ensuring that students and their families are well known and there are appropriately tailored responses to meeting their needs. Individual, small group counseling, or whole class discussions with guidance staff is flexibly scheduled when needs surface such as when fourth grade girls were concerned about hurtful gossiping. Students speak confidently that they are part of “one big family”, “loved” by all of their teachers and know where to go for help whenever they have a “big problem”. New and veteran families testify to their experience of an encouraging community that actively engages them in a large array of school or parent teacher association (PTA) sponsored offerings like afterschool multi-cultural celebrations, Saturday enrichment programs, and/or adult English-language learning classes. Opportunities for students to develop self-direction, a love for learning and self-expression are embedded in the curriculum through common use of cooperative-learning tasks, rich arts programs including visual, instrumental, vocal music and dance, and student-led leadership forums like Council for Unity and Kiwanis-Kids (“K-Kids”). In addition, special meetings with the principal and via school-wide votes on community service projects, use of funds for the arts, technology, or charitable events, allow for meaningfully involvement of students in decision-making. This positive culture fosters, for both adults and students, personal growth in self-advocacy, cooperation, and tolerance, contributing to students’ academic success and the sense of well-being. This is evident in both the number of students achieving at Levels 3 and 4 and routines effectively implemented school wide.
- A strong culture for learning results in high expectations for students and adults with structures to support students in their growth toward college and career readiness. (3.4)
 - Expectations for a positive school culture, productive classroom environments, effective teaching, and student achievement goals are communicated during on-going professional development and parent meetings, ensuring mutual accountability for teachers, administration and families. Faculty conference days are dedicated to teacher teams developing an understanding of the Citywide Instruction Expectations, Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), the school’s research-based teaching framework, and discipline code. Teacher goals are derived from a common framework and are taken into consideration during feedback from classroom

observations and for planning professional development to sustain practices aligned with expectations. Consequently, as teachers work in vertical teams, these expectations guide their work.

- Principal held parent meetings clearly explain the shifts in instruction occurring because of the CCLS. Parents also participate in classroom-based orientations to observe a student's day and aspects of the school's approach to learning, such as the use of rubrics for grading and self-reflection, technology integration, flexible groupings, and student discussions. The principal and her assistant principals effectively and consistently communicate the important connection between these strategies and the development of skills necessary for college and career readiness that include learning-to-learn, research teamwork, technology, problem-solving, listening and speaking skills. Consequently, students are involved in college and career readiness skill building. Detailed interim- and semester-based progress reports help parents understand their children's progress towards goals. Thus, parents feel equipped to assist their children at home accessing reading and math texts online through ThinkCentral. As a result, learning permeates the school, and staff and parents successfully partner in supporting progress towards achieving expected learning outcomes.
- Standards-aligned common assessments, rubrics, and on-going checks for understanding, are used across classrooms to measure student progress and make effective adjustments to meet their needs. (2.2)
 - Grade level teams use shared assessments in math and literacy, such as Fountas Pinell, Acuity Baseline and/or Benchmark, along with chapter tests from GoGo Math and Journeys Literacy program, that have been purposefully identified because of their alignment to key standards. As the school works towards full alignment of their curriculum to the CCLS, on-demand literacy and math assessment tasks are given at the beginning of a unit to inform teachers of students' current performance starting place in light of key standards. This affords individual teachers as well as vertical and grade level teams insight into student performance relative to the demands of the new standards. As a result, classroom teaching plans and curriculum maps are adjusted to ensure student success. In addition, support services for SWDs, ELLs and students with other needs are informed based on these on-going assessments, such as the recent implementation of Saturday classes for fourth and fifth graders identified as below grade-level performance standards.
 - Classrooms across every grade use assessment practices that provide a window into student understanding. There are multiple opportunities for students to discuss comprehension of ideas presented during a lesson or during a one-on-one conference with the teacher. Student review checklists that guide individual or group work and help make rubrics easier to understand. Rubrics that explain features of an argumentative essay or justification of a chosen math strategy and other learning targets help children understand goals and serve as a basis for feedback to teachers and students on next steps for improvement in pedagogy and work products. It is common for teachers to actively circulate around classrooms to listen in as students share their thinking leading to group-level decisions, and to review work products via questioning that helps to reveal student knowledge and higher order thought processes. Students confidently explain how they are doing, where they should go next to meet goals, or why they were given a certain

grade. Assessment and grading practices allow for student strengths and weakness to be known, implementation of responsive teaching, leading to learner progress being accelerated, as evidenced by results on formative assessments around analysis of plot components, use of details from text to support reasoning, and application of math concepts and skills to novel problems.

- Teachers participate on collaborative teams and engage in inquiry practices that support integration of the CCLS and make use of information relative to student progress to assist in reaching learning goals. (4.2)
 - Every classroom teacher, and out-of-classroom service providers for students with disabilities and ELLs engage minimally once weekly in structured collaborations to examine student work, lesson plans, curriculum maps, and then generate ways to make adjustments and improve their work in view of student goals and the integration of the CCLS. Currently, teacher-initiated vertical teams comprised of lead teachers from each grade level and teachers of SWD's engage in a protocol-driven review of student work relative to common assessments in math and literacy. As a result they are able to evaluate teaching and learning gaps, eliminate curricular redundancies, and ensure a staircase of increasing complexity in targeted content and skill development across grades. These insights are brought back to grade level teams that implement suggestions for unit and lesson foci or strategy emphasis. School leaders and teachers explain that teamwork assists teachers in reflecting on their own professional goals and has resulted in their growing instructional facility in performance task design, rubric creation, questioning strategies, and enhancing the support for struggling students. As a result teachers are able to help all students, including those at lower performance levels or high-end learners working above grade level, to meet elevated expectations for performance. With help from assistant principals, math and literacy coaches, who compile color-coded tracking sheets, engage in systematic review of grade level standardized test and performance task data in math, reading and writing during common meeting time, further informing instruction. An additional impact of this professional collaboration is an increased understanding of progress toward school-wide goals. In literacy, beyond-literal comprehension is targeted and, according to classroom formative assessments, students' ability to interpret and analyze more complex text is increasing.

What the school needs to improve

- Further the refinement of curricula and academic tasks using student work and data to deepen cognitive engagement and accelerate academic achievement for all learners. (1.1)
 - School leaders and faculty are aligning curricula to the CCLS by integrating numerous units of study on each grade level and incorporating identified instructional shifts. This is done with an eye towards closing performance gaps for SWDs and ELLs, and for all students to show greater growth on State assessments, including students already at Levels 3 and 4. Success in engaging students and making gains on formative assessments tasks has come about in part from the process of using student work to discover strengths and needs and then refine curriculum maps and lessons to better challenge students. The school has made purposeful decisions to align

curriculum to key state standards, integrate units, including related instructional shifts in math and literacy. However, review of the school's existing curricula reveals that grade level and subject area tasks do not consistently demand that students demonstrate they can process complex ideas, analyze sophisticated texts, and explain the math concepts associated with procedural fluencies, as the CCLS for their grade or performance levels demand. While formative assessments suggest progress towards higher standards is being made by the school's diverse population of students, limiting the complexity of some of the texts used for reading and writing response, the lack of essential questions and creating effective problem situations posed in math, further progress for students already working at levels 3 and 4 and for gifted students in the SIGMA program is hindered.

- Deepen teaching practices across all classrooms to consistently ensure all learners can access active discussions and appropriate tasks that require demonstrating high levels of thinking. (1.2)
 - Classrooms reflect clear beliefs that students learn best in a productive learning environment with clear routines and differentiated learning situations to accomplish the goals. A research-based framework informs the implementation and refinement of teaching strategies. Common teaching strategies include turn-and-talk, guided practice in group work, rubric reflection, note-taking and computer-based skill practice, or research. Some classroom discussions still volley between teacher and student, and some conversations do not require students to fully explain the rationale behind their answer. Questions or writing tasks may ask students to relate the text to themselves but do not require interpretation of multifaceted plots or motives with support from textual evidence. In some classrooms, where efforts are made to involve struggling learners with CCLS-aligned performance tasks, students were not given adequate opportunity to break down a challenging problem or could not explain the expectations the rubric outlined. As a result, demonstration of higher-order thinking in student discussion and work products particularly for SWDs and gifted students is still uneven across classrooms and not all learners are working at a level optimal to advance them from their current level of performance.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Morris H. Weiss	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