

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Mill Basin

PS 236

**6301 Avenue U
Brooklyn
NY 11234**

Principal: Mary Theresa Nelson

Dates of review: April 8-9, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Dr. Rhonda Dawn Farkas

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

PS 236 Mill Basin is an elementary school with 602 students from pre-k through grade 5. The school population comprises 25% Black, 10% Hispanic, 55% White, 8% Asian students, and 2% multi-racial students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 95.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's high expectations for all members of the school community are evidenced in the creation of a coherent vision for academic success that results in significantly higher levels of progress for all students. (3.1)
 - School leaders have shaped a cogent vision for school improvement that is focused on the citywide instructional goals and expectations, including enhancing curriculum maps to align with the instructional shifts necessitated by the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). The principal and her assistant principal engage their students in performance tasks, have increased the number of short, frequent cycles of observations and feedback sessions using a research-based teaching framework, and enhanced communication with staff, parents, and students. They communicate these goals and expectations in monthly faculty conference notes and parent newsletters, on the school's website, and in weekly email communiqués to staff. They also transparently communicate their vision for school improvement in the school's Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) and other steering documents. The school goals, which are centered on student learning and tracked for progress, are understood and adjusted accordingly by the school's constituents. This process for goals has resulted in improvements in the acceleration of student learning and social-emotional growth as evidenced by the most recent gains on assessments, the sharp decrease in the number of school-wide infractions this year, and the absence of referrals to special education. An analysis of data culled from Fountas and Pinnell reading level benchmarks reveal a 44% increase of first-grade students meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations in English language arts (ELA) and 12% of second-grade students meeting or exceeding grade-level proficiency. Additionally, in grade 4, the data culled from Acuity reflects a 4.8% increase in ELA proficiency and an 11.2% increase in math. Similarly, there was an increase of 10% in ELA and a 4.8% increase in mathematics proficiency for grade 5 students.
- School leaders communicate high expectations to staff, students, and families, and offer ongoing feedback to help them understand student progress toward those expectations thus preparing them for the next level. (3.4)
 - The principal emails her teachers a 'flow of the week' that includes an inspiring quote, a Principle of Learning, such as 'accountable talk' by which students engage in accurate and relevant classroom conversation, and the particular domain on which to focus from the school's research-based teaching framework, such as questioning or designing coherent instruction. In addition, she emphasizes particular skill and strategy foci such as comparing and contrasting and making inferences and drawing conclusions which teachers are expected to implement. Faculty and student handbooks, faculty conferences, and curriculum memos are disseminated to further illustrate the areas on which teachers and students are expected to focus. These communiqués provide clear expectations to teachers and result in conveying the instructional vision and guiding students toward mastery of the CCLS. Monthly newsletters, which are available in multiple languages, disseminated to parents, and posted on the school's portal, consistently prioritize school initiatives, articulate instructional expectations,

including college and career readiness, as well as provide links to websites that offer grade-specific resources, enabling parents to support their children at home. Additionally, numerous workshops for parents that are focused on the CCLS, including changes in testing format and meeting the needs of students with disabilities and English language learners, are conducted throughout the year. During these sessions, leaders share the school goals and progress toward their attainment, which supports their work in addressing the shifts necessitated by the CCLS. Furthermore, parents are frequently apprised of their children's progress toward mastery of teacher-created student goals. As a result, the school has established seamless partnerships with families and parents are fully aware of how they can further support their children's achievement. Moreover, the consistent dissemination of newsletters, progress reports, emails, and other modes of communication result in strong endorsement of the school's course for continuous improvement.

- The schools' safe and inclusive environment ensures ongoing academic and social emotional growth of students that result in continued progress. (1.4)

- The principal, assistant principal, and faculty have created successful school-home partnerships that demonstrate genuine positive regard for their students and families. These alliances have resulted in the formalization of the vision and mission of the school and identified goals for student performance and school improvement. School Based Support Team members and interventionists who serve on the school's instructional cabinet and pupil personnel team assist in coordinating attendance and social-emotional supports aligned with student learning needs. School leaders recognize and reward classes with high attendance rates and positive behavior with commendation cards that are prominently displayed on the school's Commendation Card Command Center and classes that earn 25 cards are rewarded with pizza parties. Additionally, teachers and school leaders established a large student council comprised of 28 students from grades 3-5 and an executive cabinet comprised of fourth and fifth graders, both of which are moderated by teachers. Student members sign contracts indicating their requisite commitment and dedication to this endeavor. For example, they are expected to meet specific criteria, including maintaining good grades and behavior, agreeing to convene monthly, and directing their energies and talents to make a positive difference in the larger community. Examples of their input on school programs, activities, and fund raising events include the organizing of philanthropic events, such as Toys for Tots, March into March with Pajamas, and a Walk-a-Thon to benefit their community members who were impacted by Hurricane Sandy. Furthermore, in response to one of the council's requests, school leaders established clear criteria for Student of the Month, which has resulted in students across the school being conversant in the skills, attitudes, and habits of mind needed to earn this honor of distinction. Such student-led school governance has led to the establishment of a platform for students' skill sharing, strategic participation, self-expression, and enhanced student involvement in key decision-making at the school. Consequently, these thoughtful contributors to school improvement have deepened the understanding of diverse perspectives, which has led to the development of student leadership skills and improved academic and personal growth, as evidenced by increased levels of motivation and collaboration as well as heightened oral and written communication skills noted on assessments and on student work products.

What the school needs to improve

- Support an increase in effective implementation of teaching practices across

classrooms to provide multiple entry points for diverse learners in order to elevate levels of student thinking, discourse, and active participation. (1.2)

- Teachers' lessons and teaching artifacts represent the coordination of available resources, including technology, and are beginning to result in instruction designed to cognitively engage all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners. Concepts and skills are introduced to students through focus lessons that include a learning objective, teaching point, and an essential question. In some classrooms, teachers scaffold instruction to ensure that all students can produce meaningful work products that promote learning, as evidenced in data-driven grouping of students, varied resources including the use of visuals, and computer-assisted programs such as Raz-Kids and Brainpop. However, teaching practices that leverage strategies such as critical, higher-order thinking, scaffolding and questioning to promote high levels of student thinking and engaging students in collaborative and independent learning experiences are not yet routinized across grades and classrooms. As a result, opportunities for students to cognitively engage in complex thinking and produce elevated levels of work products across all disciplines that reflect extended critical thinking, creativity, innovation, and problem solving are hampered.

- Ensure that instruction consistently includes complex CCLS-aligned material to stimulate higher-order thinking and build deep, conceptual understanding around specific content in order to ensure targeted instruction for all students. (1.1)

- The school's curriculum maps in all core areas have evolved this year to ensure they are clearly aligned with the CCLS in ELA and math. Nested in the curriculum maps are big ideas, and essential questions that are designed to simulate critical thought and provoke inquiry centered around the curricula on enduring understanding, skills and strategies, lessons and activities, key vocabulary, resources, and suggestions for scaffolding. These unit plans, which focus on building academic vocabulary and speaking and listening, are regularly shared with providers of instructional interventions for struggling learners and teachers have begun to translate the maps into actual classroom practice in all grades throughout the school. However, in the majority of classrooms, discussions are teacher-led and lessons that include strategic scaffolds to meet students at their multiple entry points are uneven across classrooms. Thus, opportunities for students to transfer executive control of learning to support their development as autonomous learners, take ownership of their own learning, accelerate progress, and close the achievement gap for the school's subgroups of students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, are hindered.

- Deepen the analysis of school-wide data to leverage formative assessment tools and make timely adjustments to instruction in order to propel students toward meeting the expectations of the CCLS. (2.2)

- Through strategic programming and a School-Based Option (SBO), the school ensures time for teacher collaboration, which is evolving into an inquiry-rich environment that supports collegiality and professional growth for the advancement of student achievement and acceleration of student progress. Teachers collaborate on designing grade-wide curriculum, CCLS-aligned assessments and rubrics and are held accountable for aligning student performance data with decisions for lesson planning and progress reporting.

School-wide, this information is shared with families periodically. The principal purchased SuccessMaker, a digital tool that provides teachers with adaptive, personalized paths to track student mastery of essential reading and math concepts and provides outcome-based data to inform teachers' instructional planning. Additionally, teams of teachers are responsible sharing samples of assessments, performance tasks, student work, and lessons and instructional practices related to the curricula. However, school-wide practices of culling and analyzing student data from multiple sources, including conference notes and checks for understanding, exit slips, 'thinking thumbs' hand signals, formative assessments as well as the application of students' self- and peer- assessment against rubrics are uneven, thus, limiting specific, timely and actionable feedback. Consequently, the capacity of teachers and school leaders to identify grade- and school-wide trends, draw conclusions related to student progress, meet individual students' needs, and encourage students to become self-reflective about their progress towards goals as well as their next steps to accelerate learning outcomes, is limited. Thus teachers' abilities to make adjustments to curriculum and instruction that lead all students, including high achievers, to increase their degree of progress, are impeded.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Mill Basin	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