

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**George V. Brower**

**Elementary School 289**

**900 St. Marks Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11213**

**Principal: Dennis O. Jeffers**

**Dates of review: April 4 - 5, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Victoria Armas**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

George V. Brower is an elementary school with 582 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 80% Black, 15% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 91.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school offers curricula that are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) to engage a diversity of learners in rigorous tasks. (1.1)
  - Curriculum maps and units of study are organized according to Understanding by Design (UbD) principles and include planning of tasks to expose students to complex literature and higher order thinking. The math curriculum focuses on fractions, decimals, percentages, and problem solving, incorporating the instructional shifts included in the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE). Literacy units of study integrate the areas of social studies and science in order build content knowledge and include non-fiction texts. Literacy performance tasks are aligned to the CIE and incorporate opinion writing and the creation of informational books on topics relevant to students' lives. This was evidenced in a fourth grade unit that included debates and opinion writing on the value of homework. A second grade unit on simple machines culminated in an informational book accompanied by illustrations that allowed for the integration of art activities, and connecting learning to other content areas, thus promoting higher order thinking.
  - Teachers use the Common Core Standards Strategies "Flip Chart" published by Mentoring Minds that identify grade level reading and writing standards to provide support for curriculum and lesson planning. Additionally students' lexile levels are considered in the selection of text sets that accompany units of study, thus helping to connect students of diverse levels in reading to suitable activities. Depth of Knowledge (DOK) is utilized to develop questions and group activities for lessons in order to further expose diverse levels of learners to a range of tasks.
- The entire school community supports student needs through a safe, inclusive environment that is conducive to social-emotional development and academic success. (1.4)
  - The school's theory of action based on an incentive system and positive reinforcement through the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program leads to improved classroom management and a positive tone in the building. Students earn cub paws and lion paws as rewards for academics and positive behaviors and then redeem them in the Lion's Den for school supplies and other items. As part of the PBIS program family members are awarded lion paws for their attendance to any school event, promoting increased family involvement in support of their children's academic success. Student voice is meaningfully included in school decision-making through a "Litterless" committee that is funded by a grant, and includes representatives from all school constituencies who meet weekly to discuss and develop eco-friendly initiatives. In addition, a nutrition committee comprised of student representatives from each grade level meets monthly with the dietician during school hours to discuss food choices in the cafeteria. Students from a co-share school of students with special needs (District 75) are mainstreamed into PS 289's classrooms,

promoting a culture of respect for differences in an inclusive environment for all learners.

- A full time Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialist (SAPIS), social worker, psychologist, guidance counselor, and three speech teachers, along with caring teachers, provide for and know their students well. In addition, a sub-committee of the PBIS program including teachers, administrators, and parents, identifies struggling students and an adult “adopts” the student for daily checks-in. Parents support the school through Learning Leaders and volunteer to assist in classrooms, cafeteria, auditorium, and school events. An attendance committee that monitors student attendance and lateness weekly plans attendance outreach that includes an automated telephone messenger, school letters, and personal phone calls. Outreach is documented and maintained in attendance logs that provide careful record keeping, informs monthly assemblies to which parents are invited, and allows for acknowledging perfect attendance, resulting in an average attendance rate of 93.5%.
- Assessment practices identify student progress toward goals and guide instructional decisions in order to support higher levels of achievement. (2.2)
  - Following the recommendation of the instructional cabinet, comprised of teacher grade leaders and administrators, a data room allows for posting of relevant information and regular discussions by school personnel leading to their understanding student achievement and modifying instruction accordingly. This data, that includes Acuity, Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System (E-CLAS), Early Performance Assessment in Language Arts (E-PAL), CCLS performance tasks, as well as in-house teacher created assessments, is utilized to monitor student progress and provide feedback to students. In addition, grade-level progress reports are sent home on a monthly basis. Rubrics created by teachers relative to content areas and grade level, as well as conferencing, are used to assess student work, resulting in clear feedback, and next steps for students.
  - CCLS performance tasks administered across each grade level provide student outcomes that are reviewed by teachers to determine progress and gaps in understanding. Acuity item analysis during teacher team meetings surfaced needs for instructional planning thus leading to a focus on inferencing and the incorporation of instructional strategies to advance student understanding. Progress in this skill was evidenced by post-assessments. Furthermore, teachers use this information to group students according to needs and abilities in order to provide targeted instruction, resulting in improved student achievement as evidenced on the school’s Progress Report that shows 47.1% and 57.1% of students performing at levels 3 or 4 in English language arts and in math respectively.
- Teachers engage in structured professional collaborations to analyze assessment data and student work in order to improve instruction and build staffs’ capacity. (4.2 )
  - Teachers are scheduled to meet on a regular basis at least once a week on grade level teams and cluster teachers whose schedules reflect a daily

common preparation period, are included in teacher team meetings. In addition, teachers meet during lunch and after school to continue their work. Furthermore, the instructional cabinet meets weekly to discuss student work and develop curriculum. The Common Core committee as part of a Citywide pilot aligns grade level curriculum with CCLS and includes the expertise of the grade leaders as well as additional teachers to deepen curriculum development. Teachers expressed that the committee structures provide opportunities to develop their instructional capacity through the development of curriculum and ongoing analysis of data, as well allowing them to build leadership through shared facilitation roles.

- The fourth grade teacher team, focused on the development of vocabulary, employed a tuning protocol to review a student's piece of work to identify the need for and develop strategies to support understanding words commonly used on State tests. Teachers' suggestions included the use of etymology to unlock the meaning of words, assistive technology, tactile, and visual techniques, as well as a "shades of meaning" activity. One teacher from this team stated, "Teacher teams make you feel like you are not alone and are able to address problems as a group." Teachers acknowledged that their collaboration on teacher teams is motivational and educational as new techniques shared by colleagues are implemented with struggling students resulting in improved teacher practice.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Strengthen lesson planning and teaching strategies to consistently provide multiple entry points for a variety of learners to promote high levels of thinking and participation. (1.2)
  - Most teachers provide students with an understanding of the expectations for the lesson, supported by scaffolds that include modeling and schema building through the use of thinking maps, and there are opportunities for students to share and build upon one another's ideas. Large group discussions in several classrooms showed evidence of students' ability to use language in order to extend the ideas of classmates or challenge a thought. Some lessons included differentiated group activities; however most lessons observed were delivered to the whole class limiting consistent opportunities to provide multiple entry points across classrooms to address all student-learning needs.
  - Visual teaching strategies (VTS) based on artworks and other pictures are used in some classrooms to stimulate thinking. Students are given opportunities to solidify their comprehension through daily writing in journals after Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time, and performance tasks that include the writing process. Teachers conduct shared reading during lessons including interactive questioning, although opportunities for students to discuss ideas among themselves were often missed, hindering even higher levels of thinking and participation.
- Refine systems for providing effective feedback and actionable next steps to teachers to further advance professional growth. (4.1)

- School leaders weekly conduct both formal and informal observations of teachers and provide effective feedback and general next steps after each classroom visit. New teachers are provided with a mentor and are supported through teacher team meetings and intervisitations to the classrooms of colleagues. Teachers indicated that the school's use of the Danielson Framework as a guide to improve instructional practice places an emphasis on planning as well as provides a common language in order to improve upon strategies for differentiation. Although school leaders are observing lessons regularly and providing feedback, strategic use of informal cycles of classroom visits that incorporate student outcomes lacks consistency, thus hindering teachers' ability to sufficiently strengthen their practice relative to their students' needs.
- The Danielson Framework has been implemented for informal teacher observations and the Teacher Effectiveness Intensive has conducted six visits this year to further support the school's understanding of the focus competencies. Formal observation reports clearly note strengths, challenges, and next steps to support teacher development, yet although teachers set goals aligned to school wide goals, individual discussions by school leaders with all teachers regarding their goals was uneven. Additionally, feedback sessions after classroom observations do not always reference the goals, thus limiting further advancement of teacher development.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: George V. Brower	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 <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>							
<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>