

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

P.S. 346 Abe Stark

**Elementary School K346
1400 Pennsylvania Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11239**

Principal: Kevin Caifa

Dates of review: October 24-25,2012

Lead Reviewer: Ronald Feinstein

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Abe Stark Primary School 346 is an elementary school with 716 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 67% Black, 27% Hispanic, 4% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 94.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal makes effective and strategic organizational decisions in support of the school's instructional goals, thus diminishing the achievement gap for all students. 1.3
 - The principal has used budget allocations well to create an ICT class in all grades but one, to the immediate benefit of students with disabilities and English language learners, who have traditionally made good progress earning extra credit on the school's Progress Report. Reassignments of effective teachers to the upper grades and the recent hiring of an assistant principal dedicated to the upper grades also, is a direct response to the most recent State summative data, which indicates that students struggle in responding to combinations of literary and informational texts and real-world application of mathematics. This delivers much needed expertise, since teachers who move up into higher grades ensure an understanding of every grade level's inter-connected expectations. Departmentalization of mathematics and literacy at the fourth and fifth grades creates opportunities for more rigorous student work and ensures further alignment to the school's instructional goals. For example, in a fifth grade mathematics lesson, students were assigned roles in teams, which resulted in artifacts that required them to include at least four ways to solve problems involving adding fractions with uncommon denominators, using examples and models. Students then had to write a narrative explaining which method they prefer, describe the circumstances that would warrant that choice and defend that choice in a summary presentation at end of the period.
- The school aligns common assessments to curriculum and uses rubrics to provide feedback to students, determine student progress toward goals and inform adjustments to curriculum and instruction. 2.2
 - Across classrooms, teachers use common rubrics and grading policy. To ensure complete objectivity and strict adherence to the rubric, teachers only score student work on common core units of study from classrooms other than their own. For example, teacher teams analyzed fourth and fifth grade student work from the first implemented common core unit of study. The teachers designed tasks focused on figurative language in poetry and song lyrics, written and performed, as well as aligned to grade appropriate common core standards in literacy. This practice of evaluating student work from each other's classrooms results in more actionable feedback to individual students and teachers, enabling teachers at grade level meetings to make instructional decisions at the team, classroom and individual level, from a synthesis of item skills analysis data student work and other classroom data that create a clear path to student achievement.
 - The school creates customized assessments that are administered across content areas in September and used to evaluate students' progress on goals and make critical adjustments in curriculum

and instruction for whole grades, classes and specific groups. For example, instruction on persuasive essays was moved earlier into curriculum maps in fourth grade as a result of harvested data. Baseline assessments, summative data and student performance on classroom rubrics are analyzed to make sure the data tell a consistent story. Disparities are further mined for meaning. For instance, the school uncovered significant discrepancies between summative data, customized Acuity and Response to Intervention (RTI) designation, which prompted a closer look at individual students and the reassignment of students, in early fall, to more appropriate intervention groupings.

- The principal's observations of classroom practice elevate school-wide practices through effective feedback for all teachers and targeted support for new teachers, thus providing leverage for professional growth. 4.1
 - All teachers, including two new teachers, have been scheduled for cycles of 6-8 short frequent classroom observations and to date, all teachers have had at least 2 classroom visits. The school introduced a common teaching framework last year and continues the work this year, with a focus on designing coherent instruction, using questioning and discussion techniques, and using assessment in instruction, as outlined in the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE). In September, all teachers completed a self-reflection aligned to the common framework. The self-reflections revealed that most teachers wanted more professional development and intervisitations on questioning and discussion techniques, as defined by the common teaching framework. The professional development calendar for the school year and feedback from administrators address these needs. In one example, feedback to a fifth grade teacher focused attention on the significant number of students who had completed their work, but did not have any additional assignment to accelerate learning. In reviewing this same teacher's lesson plan on the day of the review, I noted that the lesson addressed this former deficit, and in fact, during the lesson, students who finished a task quickly, knew what to do to continue to be productive while waiting for the rest of the class to finish working on their projects.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure effective implementation of rigorous academic tasks that require higher order thinking skills, promote college and career readiness and result in cognitive engagement of all learners. 1.1
 - School leaders and teachers continue to identify key state standards that drive school improvement and incorporate the most recent data from the state item skills analyses. While there is a rationale for where and when the CCLS units of study are to be implemented and attention has been given to the instructional shifts in both math and literacy, there is not enough clarity about how this work serves to close the achievement gap and promote college and career readiness for all students. The principal articulates the incorporation of the school's definition of rigor. However

there is inconsistent evidence of a focus on higher order thinking skills and rigor in plans and academic tasks that students are asked to do. For example, while in one fourth grade lesson students were engaged in responding to a thoughtful and provocative series of questions provided by the teacher to prompt their turn and talk, other lessons consisted primarily of teacher talk, with limited opportunities for students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills.

- Deepen the use of teaching strategies linked to a research-based teaching framework that enables staff to develop questioning and discussion practices that lead to meaningful work products. 1.2
 - The principal's articulated beliefs about how students learn best includes consistent use of the workshop model and attention to phonics and fluency. Implementation of curriculum linked to Read Well addresses the literacy needs of the school's large entering population in pre-kindergarten through second grades, and Reading Streets is the curriculum for balanced literacy in the upper grades. However, there is no evidence that lessons are consistently informed by the school's chosen common teaching framework and this limits the effectiveness of teacher pedagogy in reaching all students. Evidence of the school's long-time focus on questioning and discussion strategies is demonstrated unevenly across classrooms and academic tasks, for the most part, do not engage all students in demonstrating higher order thinking in their work. For example, while one fifth grade math lesson demonstrated thoughtful preparation, including prompts encouraging high levels of critical thinking, in another fifth grade math class, tasks presented extremely low levels of challenge, limiting students' opportunities to produce meaningful artifacts.
- Ensure teacher teams consistently engage in the analysis of student work and assessment data to accelerate improvement in teacher practice and progress towards students' goals. 4.2
 - While a majority of the school's teachers engage in professional team collaborations, there is no evidence of a consistent or articulated understanding of how inquiry works to support school-wide goals and strengthen teacher practice. For example, in one team meeting, each participant had a protocol for analyzing data, but it was never used. In addition, the data this team shared was not student specific, which limited the capacity of the team to maximize progress towards goals for individuals and groups of students with similar needs.
 - Teacher team analysis of student work inconsistently surfaced gaps in student understanding since the team's understanding of primary and secondary trait rubrics are developing. For example a teacher constructed rubric focused on author's use of figurative language but the rubric evaluated other writing components such as mechanics, supporting details and use of an introduction that states the writer's opinion. To their credit, teachers discussed contradictions their rubric revealed, the subsequent disparities in their evaluation of student work and the potential for student misunderstanding. Such misconceptions hinder continued improvements in the instructional capacity of teachers

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: P.S. 346 Abe Stark	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