

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Fort Greene Preparatory Academy

**Middle School K691
100 Clermont Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11205**

Principal: Paula Lettiere

Dates of review: March 18-19, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Barbara Freeman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

MS 691 is a middle school with 270 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 73% Black, 21% Hispanic, 4% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 21% 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 94.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's curricula is highly engaging and challenging, enabling all learners to participate in rigorous units of study and academic tasks. (1.1)
 - Curricula planning began in August with school leaders and staff working to integrate Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the expectations for instruction for the school year, into units of study in all core content areas. The school also undertook Understanding by Design (UBD) to support unit and lesson planning. A review of units of study showed that the school focused on the instructional shifts in literacy and mathematics, including writing with evidence, increasing reading of informational text, written explanation of mathematical understanding, and citing text based evidence to support claims, as key components for successful integration of the CCLS. All units of study include an essential question to sustain the work of the unit, deepen students' understanding of grade specific concepts and keep them engaged in the topic. Across content areas, tasks stress academic and personal behaviors that students need, to produce meaningful work in groups and individually, resulting in demanding curricula that is accessible to all students.
 - School leaders and teacher teams are constantly reviewing student work and student data to determine how challenging instructional tasks are for students. The school also utilizes the support of external consultants up to three times a week, to work with teacher teams to discuss student work production, the quality of student work and its alignment to assigned tasks. The school's emphasis on academic behaviors such as collaboration in groups, organization, engagement and persistence, has heightened students' work habits. Teachers ensure that they are using Bloom's Taxonomy in the development of questions that lead to deep student group discussions. Students in a grade 8 English Language arts class are asked to read "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" and explore multiple themes within the text. Students are also responsible for having group discussions around recurring themes, producing reports exploring those themes and developing their own representation of their learning. Teachers engage in deliberate planning to support students with disabilities and English language learners, which result in tasks designed to enable all students to use higher order thinking skills and other academic behaviors to produce meaningful work.
- Teacher practice is aligned to a core belief system and curricula that enable students to produce high quality work. (1.2)
 - The school believes that middle school students work best when there are clear expectations for academic and personal behaviors. Teachers believe that if challenging work is connected to the real world and students are supported with a sense of belonging, they will achieve at high levels. Thus students and staff engage in lots of purposeful conversations that lead to the creation of meaningful work products. For example, grade 8 students produced multi- representational work on themes in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, to illustrate their learning. Teachers have adapted their pedagogy to strengthen common teaching strategies across classrooms, create multiple opportunities to assess student

learning and utilize the strategy of questioning in order to sustain group discussions that lead to higher levels of understanding. The use of the Danielson framework for teaching has established clear expectations for teacher practice and facilitates the use of multi-levels of evidence to measure teacher effectiveness. This has led to coherence between instructional practices and the school's core belief system, as teachers work with challenging curricula to support all learners.

- Teachers consistently alter instructional tools, such as graphic organizers, for specific students and have incorporated additional supports, including additional personnel and alternative materials, to ensure that all students produce quality work. Consistent instructional practices such as entrance slips, stop and jots, exit slips, and a workshop model which includes independent practice, are evident across classrooms. Teachers also adapt their lesson delivery to include small group and targeted instruction for students who need additional supports. Teachers use questioning to further students' discussions and deepen their understanding of concepts. This has led to multiple access points for students at varied ability levels to engage in rigorous units of study and tasks that demonstrate their knowledge in multiple ways.
- The school has developed an inclusive culture, with strategic approaches that support academic and personal behaviors for students and staff, leading to high levels of trust among members of the school community. (1.4)
 - The school is committed to ensuring that positive attitudes and trust lead to growth of all members of the school community. Staff is visible in the hallways during the change of classes and problems are addressed immediately by adults. Student voice is evident, with students advocating for themselves academically and behaviorally, and participating in surveys that determine electives like the inclusion of a Law class, extracurricular activities and dances. Teachers stress academic professionalism in their plans and conferences with students and as part of students' self- reflection. Through strategic scheduling, adults receive professional development throughout the day, based on conversations with school leaders. School coaches support teachers as they work on attaining success in clear benchmarks for growth. The principal produces a newsletter that celebrates the progress of staff and highlights practices that have transformed classroom instruction and increased student engagement in difficult tasks.
 - The principal states that, "it's impossible not to know every child's name. We are small enough to know everyone." The school has also created tools which are user-friendly and insure that every staff member can get an academic story of every student. Students also have multiple opportunities to participate in activities in which they interface with adults daily. The administrative cabinet meets formally once per week and informally in the mornings and afternoons to do check-ins. Student attendance is monitored by the guidance counselor who is very visible, aware of students' behavioral needs, and works to support them and their families. Grade 8 students have been impacted the most by policy changes at this growing new school, as they are the ones who most

frequently violate codes of conduct and school policies. This year the school has done deliberate work around social behaviors, stressing specific behaviors. For example, students in grade 6 focus on friendships,

since they need to build interpersonal skills necessary for classwork in groups with students whom they are not familiar with. This refinement of supports has led to a more targeted support system, enabling students to be successful academically and behaviorally and providing adults with information to support students' needs.

- School leaders use the tool of observation to provide effective feedback to teachers to support their development, resulting in school wide elevation of teacher practice and professional growth. (4.1)
 - School leaders spend most of their time in classrooms, conducting formal and informal observations of staff. Since approximately half of the teaching staff is probationary, constant monitoring of instructional practices aligned to content knowledge is crucial in order to elevate pedagogy school wide. Teachers meet with school leaders to discuss the lesson to be observed and get feedback on areas of focus. They also have the opportunity to be reflective about the lesson and prepare for additional meetings with school leaders around the research-based rubric that measures their effectiveness and determines their rating in specific domains of instruction. School leaders work with them in outlining next steps, drafting improvement plans and scheduling future observation dates to provide consistent support for their development. As a result, teachers are accountable for their own professional growth, with school leaders providing feedback that improves their practice.
 - The school uses the Danielson rubric to measure teacher effectiveness and has embraced the rubric in order to provide a common language of specific classroom behaviors and practices and how they measure up against student work samples and classroom data. Through formal and informal observations teachers receive consistent feedback highlighting their strengths and areas in which they need to continue to develop in order for all students to be successful. Teachers who are struggling in moving their practice frequently have direct conversations with school leaders who put supports in place in order to assist them. Samples of teachers' observation reports illustrate areas in which teachers have been commended, areas of concern and then next steps. Supports of the coaches and school leaders are crucial to the plan. Through constant feedback and informal observations school leaders have the opportunity to be engaged in professional development of staff, resulting in an observation cycle that allows teachers time to grow and develop.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to refine assessments and the school's grading policy to reflect the changes needed to adjust curricula and instruction to accurately measure student progress. (2.2)
 - Assessment strategies are aligned to instructional goals based on student essays that are graded on a rubric. Interim assessments are aligned to unit of study goals and benchmark assessments along with pre-assessments that are included to monitor student progress throughout the unit. Entrance and exit slips are used as additional data points in measuring student progress and how students should be grouped. The school is also deepening their work around student portfolios in order for them to illustrate student growth throughout the year. However,

assessment and grading practices are not yet comprehensive enough to yield accurate information about student mastery of targeted skills and related standards.

- Teachers look at student work samples weekly to determine student progress around mastery of skills highlighted during unit planning. Goals based on 75% of the students mastering benchmarks are highlighted and interventions planned for those not meeting benchmarks. Every unit has prerequisite skills checks, requires written work and mandates culminating activities to illustrate a variety of representations of student work. Adjustments to curricula are made in teacher teams based on student performance throughout the unit. However, inadequate alignment between student work and curricula adjustments lessens the school's ability to accurately determine actual student progress, with the result that student mastery of goals is not maximized.
- Strengthen teacher team work to include more strategic use of student work to enhance instructional coherence across disciplines and accelerate learning for all staff and students. (4.2)
 - Teachers across grades and content areas plan together. Coaches along with network personnel provided professional development in August to determine the units of study and develop pacing calendars. During the grade 6 team meeting the science teacher described an upcoming unit, the Rocket Initiative, and solicited information from core content areas teachers in order to align the unit with those disciplines. The science unit would incorporate the analysis of data and the math teachers provided information on skills not taught yet. The English language arts teachers provided support on the requirements for report writing, which would be the culminating activity for the Rocket Initiative and provided informational texts that are relevant to the unit. Math teachers developed a rubric they wanted to share with the team in order to get feedback and adaptation to other curricula areas as well as evaluate how they could directly link the Rocket Initiative to support the math team's work around short answer responses. However, team members did not discuss and explore natural connections between the content areas, limiting cohesiveness between the disciplines and reducing opportunities to enrich adult and student learning.
 - Teachers use benchmark assessment data and student work to determine how well students are performing. The observed English Language Arts team discussed the alignment of skills based on an informational text article that a grade 8 teacher planned to use to support her theme. Teachers read the article and drafted vocabulary and skills they thought necessary for students to read and understand the deeper concepts within the article. Teachers then discussed what skills would be taught in which grade. However, teachers did not bring student work samples or lists of skills for mastery in each grade, limiting their ability to rely on students' current knowledge to accurately inform their planning of future work to promote student mastery of learning goals.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Fort Greene Preparatory Academy	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