

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

The Spectrum School

75M094

**55 Battery Park Place
New York
NY, 10280**

Principal: Ronnie Shuster

Dates of review: May 7-9, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Karen Anderson

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Spectrum School is a K-8 school with 232 students from Kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 36% Black, 43% Hispanic, 13% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 83% of the students enrolled and girls account for 17%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 89.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

DRAFT

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The highly supportive and mutually respectful learning environment created by the principal and her cohesive leadership team ensure social/ emotional, academic and personal growth of the entire school community. (1.4)
 - School leaders have created a dynamic and supportive environment where staff and families collaborate to effectively develop and sustain a community that ensures that the academic, social/emotional and behavioral success is obtainable for all students. They stated, “We went everywhere as a team to deliver the same message.” Students stated that their accomplishments are celebrated and evidence of respectful interactions among all stakeholders is clearly and consistently demonstrated across the school community. Students compliment and encourage peers and provide assistance when needed. The school has strong relationships with community-based organization, especially within the Arts. One of the most noteworthy and impactful programs is Sequential Teaching in the Arts Action Research (STAARS), funded by a 3-year grant focused on the development of students’ social/emotional, academic and daily living skills, which is especially important for students with Autism which represents a majority of this school’s population. Student participants not only have opportunities to perform, but those with skills for writing lyrics and script have a platform to be showcased. Furthermore, school-wide multidisciplinary support teams consist of mandated members at each site: classroom teachers, Unit Coordinators, Related Service Providers and Paraprofessionals who monitor interventions for individual students and determine Response to Intervention (RtI) delivery. Classroom teachers maintain intervention binders with data collection and analysis documentation such as point sheets, Functional Behavior Analysis (FBA) /Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP), Student Annual Needs Determination Inventory (SANDI), Everyday Arts in Special Education (EASE) and conduct daily routines utilizing the Mood Meter (EL) and yoga (GRTL). SANDI aligns assessment, access to grade level standards, and rigorous research-based instruction in order to specifically target individual student strengths and needs. The EASE program provides tools and resources to develop higher-order thinking skills embedded in classroom arts-based activities. The Mood Meter is a tool used during activities within the Emotional Literacy (EL) program to develop skills in recognizing and labeling feelings; advanced activities develop skills in understanding, expressing, and regulating emotions. The Get Ready to Learn (GRTL) program is yoga-based and helps to reduce stress, focus attention, enhance performance and improve behaviors in the classroom and beyond. Data supports the impact of these initiatives on increased positive multi-disciplinary outcomes for students across populations and grades. Movement to a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is represented by a .028% referral rate of 5 students to inclusion classrooms and two graduating middle school students being placed in general education high school classes for September 2013; and a .008% increase of students moving from 6:1:1 classroom settings to 8:1:1 settings. Related service decreases are represented in Speech (14%), Occupational Therapy (13.6%), Physical Therapy (5.6%) and Counseling (2.4%). The school was placed on the Persistently Dangerous List. However, these initiatives to cultivate an inclusive environment have led to their current OORS report showing zero Level 5 incidents and zero principal and superintendent suspensions. In addition, individual student support resulted in related services being modified or terminated: Speech (44 modified and 2 terminated); Physical Therapy (3 modified and 1 terminated); Occupational Therapy (22 modified and 6 terminated); and Counseling (2 modified).

- School leaders maintain a supportive culture for learning that communicates high expectations for achievement with a vision toward shared responsibility by stakeholders for the continuing progress of all students. (3.4)
 - The school has multiple avenues of communication by which they consistently relay high expectations to staff, students and families. Within each classroom across the school community there are consistent, ongoing practices: a communication book is utilized in lower grades as a daily means of dialogue for information between parents and teachers. Teachers often lend their expertise and provide strategies that parents can utilize at home. One parent spoke of purchasing a GRTL DVD online after viewing her son performing yoga moves which had a calming effect. The mother also attended GRTL training at the school and now joins her son in the movements. Ongoing workshops for parents focus on a myriad of topics, including curriculum and available services. Parents have direct access to administrators and teachers. Monthly School Leadership Team meetings, newsletters, e-mails and an “open door policy” provide additional access. Parents feel very “connected” to the school and stated their children are “accepted for who they are”. A few spoke of their children becoming verbal and responsive as a result of participation in the Arts programs, especially STAARS. Teachers and paraprofessionals work as a teaching team. A Staff Responsibility Matrix is utilized for sharing responsibility for individual student success. Each adult has time to work with a student or small group of students on a daily rotating basis. Jobs such as setting work stations or organizing the library are equally distributed. Teachers participate in many initiatives and events within the school community, including afterschool and Saturday programs for students. The teachers designed and/or modified the year-long curriculum, units and the school-wide rubric and teaching points are prominently displayed in each classroom across the community. Teachers are expected to access the online database on a regular, ongoing basis to submit documents, dialogue with peers and administrators and submit units, lessons and performance tasks. Deadlines and other pertinent information lives in this repository. Teacher teams meet daily for double periods to look at student work and plan learning opportunities for students and inter-visit each other’s classrooms. Joint Action Routines (JARS) are used daily to develop spontaneous conversation and increased social understanding; given a familiar and predictable routine, teachers or parents can encourage communication by providing frequent repetition and rehearsal of target language within a functional or motivating activity. All of these reflective and collaborative practices have resulted in adjustment and modification to lessons and units embedded in the curriculum that promote optimal access and success for independent postsecondary living for students.
- Across classrooms teacher practices reflect a research-based, coherent belief system on how students learn best by providing multiple entry points for learning across student groups resulting in meaningful work products. (1.2)
 - Training for teachers in unpacking and understanding the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) is ongoing to clarify implications of practice in service of students with moderate to severe disabilities. The majority of the students has high needs in most or all curricular areas and requires very intense structured individual programming, continual adult supervision and individual strategies to engage in all tasks. The school utilizes an online data collection system: Goggle Docs, where staff commonly exchanges resources and tools, as well as, student work samples for peer feedback. This platform also fosters opportunities for staff across multiple sites to share best practices, dialogue and inquire. Teachers create Smart Plans for Inquiry as a guide to identify CCLS skill gaps and to strategize possible interventions. Teachers across grade bands and populations collaboratively create common unit plans and task rubrics. These units and rubrics are clearly evident across the school

community. The students are consistently engaged in activities that reflect the standards, but work is adapted or modified in groupings within classrooms as appropriate, such as Leave it Better, a regeneration health project that builds social skills through rigorous questioning and Give Me 20, a program which develops purposeful dialogue for students across environments. Materials are visual and multisensory and work stations are strategically planned. Paraprofessionals actively engage with students and the use of technology is purposeful such as the SMARTboard, iPad. Students' augmentative and alternative communication devices are programmed to provide access and participation in instruction. Teachers constantly adapt and modify general education instruction, in addition to having support from related service providers and English as Second Language teachers who provide push-in and pull-out services. As a result of these efforts, standards-based curricula and academic tasks are designed across subjects and grades and specifically tailored to the students with special needs.

- The school's coherent and engaging curriculum offers opportunities for all students to engage in focused learning experiences aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) that result in increasing levels of achievement. (1.1)
 - The school selected a range of curricular and programs to provide instructional access for their students across a broad range of cognitive abilities/disabilities and across the Autism Spectrum: Everyday Math (standardized), EQUALS Math curriculum for students with disabilities, and the District 75 Units of Study for ELA, supplemented by programs such as Reading A-Z, Foundations, Go Math and Sounds in Motion. Classroom libraries are leveled according to Fountas & Pinnell using high interest/low level informational and non-fiction texts. Visual, verbal and gestural prompts and cues are embedded in all aspects of instruction. The administration, staff and parents have repeatedly expressed the positive impact and influence the Arts have on student progress within all content/discipline areas, especially in development of receptive and expressive language. The school prioritizes vocabulary development, CCLS Language 6 and Speaking & Listening as an instructional focus based on students' individual education plan goals. English language learners participate in two programs with a focus on development of speaking and listening skills: Learning English Through The Arts (LETTA), a Saturday direct instruction program and Leave it Better, a regeneration project focused on building social and questioning skills aligned to CCLS. These efforts accelerate continued student progress toward closing the achievement gap as evident in various progress monitoring data streams: Reading All Stars data show an increase in student stamina for remaining on task and completion of assignments in both standardized and alternate assessment classrooms. Reading A-Z data from October to April, for 200 students, show a 72% mastery of at least one chapter based on baseline frustration level. The Assessment Practice Grant (APG) analysis of the SMILE data indicates 100% of the students made at least one level of gain from below basic (under 65%) to basic (65%-90%). SMILE is a multi-sensory program that engages learners in a sequential program beginning with attention and imitation tasks, through phoneme and syllable learning, noun vocabulary, additional vocabulary including verbs, adjectives and adverbs, going on to simple sentences and then short stories. Data from EQUALS shows 70-75% of students in alternate assessment have mastered at least one skill-focused Unit based, on a baseline of functional performance.

What the school needs to improve

- Formalize the structure regarding observations and feedback to teachers so that articulated next steps further develop teacher practice and help to more effectively target professional development efforts. (4.1)

- The administrative team conducts frequent, informal observations and classroom walkthroughs. Feedback is provided as informal recommendations to teachers. How Goggle Docs online platform is utilized to capture written feedback to teachers after informal observations and serves as a forum for dialogue with administrators. Post-observation feedback is currently inconsistent and not always based on low-inference evidence of the lesson and/or aligned to instructional goals, therefore it alleviates the strategic impact and growth that would serve to strengthen pedagogical skills. Although teachers speak to knowing their areas for growth, the observation data does not consistently provide clear, specific and actionable next steps. A DOE talent coach has begun to conduct “norming” observations with the administrative team to develop scripting low-inference notes and writing specific feedback to teachers. School leaders and teachers identified areas for professional growth in September/October primarily based on the citywide recommended competencies from the Danielson Framework for Teaching, coupled with some teachers also directed to attend Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) training as support for working with behaviors in new student populations. Within the last two years the school has transitioned from classes with students in standardized assessment to students in alternate assessment. Teacher learning plan goals do not identify specific skill gaps or include formal self-assessment and reflection. Observation data shows teachers have made at least one level of gain in their instructional practice, however, progression of skills and techniques are not monitored. Comparative data of baseline and mid-year professional goal assessment is not in place to assist teachers in making appropriate adjustments in their practice, resulting in better student outcomes. Teachers engage in a multitude of professional learning opportunities that inconsistently align to areas in need of improvement as evident in observation data. The lack of accountability and monitoring of implementation of these learnings hinders honing of craft in utilizing strategies which are specifically designed to target the individual needs of students with moderate to significant cognitive delays.
- Extend data analysis practices so that information gathered creates a clear picture of student progress to strategically adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels. (2.2)
 - There are several assessment tools used across sites that are aligned to the school’s instructional focus and available on Goggle Docs: Reading A-Z, SANDI, Acuity, EQUALS, Everyday Math, and others. Collection of data is ongoing and evident in student binders, and discussed in teacher teams and during staff meetings. However, ongoing checks for understanding which support identification of gaps in student learning and surface what students know and are able to do aligned and connected to CCLS to determine adjustments to planning are not evident. Data is currently not aggregated to the most granular level and therefore informed strategic planning is alleviated. There is an inconsistency across classrooms in the way formative assessment data is collected and analyzed to individualize support for students and move them further towards optimal academic success. For example, self-assessment, peer review, checklists and exit slips were utilized infrequently in classrooms within and across sites. Though students had an understanding of rubric performance levels (1, 2, 3 and 4) and had broad ideas of what they did well or not, they were unable to identify specific skills in need of development for a content area. Student-friendly rubrics are not utilized. As a result, rubrics used as a means to provide a gradual release of responsibility to the students and promote an increased level of independence and responsibility for their own learning is hampered.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: The Spectrum School	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