

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**P.S. 191 Amsterdam**

**Elementary School 03M191**

**210 WEST 61 STREET  
MANHATTAN  
NY,10023**

**Principal: MARIA VERDESOTO**

**Dates of review: April 4-5, 2013  
Lead Reviewer: Ilene Altschul**

### Information about the school

P.S. 191 Amsterdam is a/an Elementary school with 549 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 37% Black, 46% Hispanic, 9% White, and 7% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 17% 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 91.8%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

### What the school does well

- The school's well designed, cognitively engaging, project-based curricula is aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards and the magnet theme fostering college and career readiness and rigorous habits for all students. (1.1)
  - The Museum magnet theme emphasizes exploring, experimenting, explaining and exhibiting within all content areas through the use of technology and museum education as primary and secondary sources. Through the rigorous planning for the Museum magnet theme, school faculty developed curriculum units incorporating the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the citywide instructional shifts including an increase in reading and writing informational texts and emphasis on mathematical thinking. The units engage students in inquiry-based learning through integration of technology and twenty-first century tools across content areas. The Hess cognitive rigor matrix is used to determine the level of complexity for each task. In eighth grade science, within the unit on reproduction, heredity and evolution, students completed the project "Survival of the Fittest: Adapting to Changing Times". Students designed an island with three species of frogs and chose a disaster that impacts the island. The students explained the effect of the disaster particularly on the frog species and the adaptations that helped the frog survive. This task was a 3.6 on the cognitive rigor matrix indicating that it required strategic thinking, and reasoning and creation. In third grade, students created an informational text on marine animals revising the common core bundle suggested by the department of education with a cognitive matrix of 3.2 requiring strategic thinking and reasoning, and understanding. All students including English language learners and students with disabilities are engaged in these tasks and have access through different modes of learning such as the use of technology, visuals and creation of i-movies and puppet shows. Through the "Dream, Think, Do Exhibit" held twice a year, students collaboratively create, display, and explain their projects through varied mediums. These units and tasks promote academic and personal behaviors such as engagement, collaboration and communication, and work habits. As a result of thoughtfully designed unit planning all students are engaged in challenging tasks and high-level thinking.
- Across classrooms, lessons reflect a shared belief to provide students with multiple entry points into the curricula ensuring all students are engaged in challenging tasks and produce meaningful work products. (1.2)
  - Teachers implement a workshop approach for lessons in which they present the mini-lesson and then the students "try-it" in partnerships or small groups. The research-based framework supports the teachers' beliefs that students need to be engaged in a discussion and high-level questions. In addition, activities need to be appropriate to the students' level and cognitively engaging in understanding content. In the majority of classes, students receive targeted instruction in small groups based on teachers' assessment of running records, *Successmaker*, or *Acuity* assessments. In other classes, students work in partnerships or groups and teachers "listen in" to facilitate discussion amongst the group. In a seventh grade science class, the teacher offers direct support to a group of 7 students as they conduct an experiment on creating supersaturated solutions. A student teacher works with another group and the rest of the class answers questions on solutions on the E-science application on the iPad, tailored to their reading ability. In a third grade math class, the teachers are working with the students in groups on solving multi-step word problems. Through station teaching, 2 groups of students

receive focused instruction aligned with the identified needs based on previous lessons while the third group uses the *Successmaker* technology program to review the concept of solving mathematical problems using the four operations. These structures and teaching strategies provide necessary scaffolds and supports to meet the learning needs of all students. As a result all students are engaged in high level tasks and thinking as demonstrated in their work products.

- School leaders make tactical decisions to utilize resources and structure teacher time to support the instructional goals and increase student achievement. (1.3)
  - The principal strategically uses the school's budget for professional development, partnerships, and technology to meet the school goals that all students are engaged in inquiry based learning, reading and writing informational texts and applying mathematical thinking. The resources are used to fund a magnet specialist, a technology specialist, a staff developer and consultant days with Aussie to further develop the instructional capacity of the staff and to monitor and revise the curriculum units. Per session funding is provided for teachers to participate in curriculum writing and professional development with the consultants. Partnerships with Lincoln Center Institute, NY Historical Society, and Studio in a School support the teachers integrating the arts and social studies with the magnet theme. As a result, there is greater coherence across all grades encompassing the museum magnet theme as evidenced through art displays, i-movies, student writing and "Dream, Think, Do" exhibitions.
  - School leaders made a commitment to ensure that teachers participate in structured inquiry time. Through a school-based option, all teachers partake in inquiry meetings on Thursday mornings. The team leaders receive professional development on the protocols for analyzing student work and review the agenda with the assistant principal. Team leaders then introduce the protocol at their respective meetings. Successful practices that resulted in improved student work are shared with the school community through the school's internal website and at faculty meetings twice a year resulting in coherence across grades and increased communication. As a result of the collaboration, school goals are being met and students are engaged in high-level tasks aligned with the curriculum units.
- School leaders utilize the observation process to provide feedback to teachers resulting in professional growth and increased instructional capacity. (4.1)
  - Administration identifies the needs of the teachers according to their experience and years teaching at the school, grade level and CCLS. Administrators observe teachers four to six times through short observations using Danielson framework with the lens of coherent planning, questioning and discussion and assessment practices. The focus of the observations may shift depending on the strengths of the teachers. For example, a new teacher received support and feedback aligned with her planning and classroom management while a more experienced teacher's observation focused around questioning and assessment practices. The professional development calendar delineates specific instructional priorities to be addressed. For example, summer workshops emphasized planning and curriculum development, and in September more focus on technology, text complexity, Depth of Knowledge (DOK) and creating rubrics. Starting in September, the staff developer holds afterschool and Saturday workshops. New teachers attend workshops to support the CCLS and they receive on-site mentoring. Administration has a teacher evaluation plan indicating time frame for goal setting meetings, formal observations and informal, short observations. In the goal setting meeting, teachers identify their strengths and areas for growth which is memorialized with a letter from the administrator. Teachers state they are observed more frequently and the feedback supports them in further

developing their practice. For example, one teacher moved to a more student-centered classroom with an increase in discussion. The written feedback clearly indicates the next steps to further enhance discussion techniques and growth was evident in subsequent observation reports. Accordingly, the teachers are familiar with the expectations of the research-based framework and enhancing teacher growth and instructional practices.

## What the school needs to improve

- Further develop the school's culture through strategically aligned professional development and well-defined protocols to address all discipline and social-emotional concerns and lead to all students' academic and behavioral success. (1.4)
  - The school has strong structures in place in developing a safe environment that is conducive to student learning. The Instructional Support Team (IST) including the guidance counselor and the social worker meets twice a week to discuss concerns regarding students' academic and behavioral concerns as evident by minutes and agendas. Another team made up of teachers, the Project Positive Team, develops series of activities for teachers to implement in conjunction with the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program where students receive reward cards to trade in weekly at the school store. Students are aware of the respectful and positive behaviors needed to earn these cards however not all teachers are implementing this program in the same manner and the impact of the PBIS program is not tracked regularly. Prior to the implementation of the PBIS program, all teachers participated in professional development supporting the goals of the initiative. In addition, the guidance counselor provides workshops on bullying through in-class lessons and a town hall meeting was held for middle school students where they explored different scenarios and responses to bullying. Students state that they are respected and that there is a staff member that they feel comfortable going to if there is a problem. Students agree that they are supported academically and teachers are always available to assist them with their work. Students expressed that they have voice in determining their unit projects and presentations which emphasize collaboration and perseverance. Students also have voice on the student council where they focus on fundraising and charity events. Across the school although these initiatives have increased student voice and participation, teachers indicate that there is still a need for support with students that occasionally disrupt the learning environment. In response the school created a code system to respond to classroom incidents but there is still a need to increase the behavior modifications so that school wide efforts yield all students adopting effective behaviors.
- Strengthen teacher assessment practices to include meaningful feedback and reflect varied use of ongoing checks for understanding during lesson delivery so that all students demonstrate increased mastery. (2.2)
  - Teachers use results from common assessments such as Fountas and Pinnell running records, Acuity in ELA and Math, Museum Magnet School (MMS) assessments, performance tasks, and "magic words" in grades K and 1 to determine student progress. Teachers track student data which is analyzed by the school' data team and uploaded to an internal website. However a review of teachers' data binders reveal inconsistencies in the frequency and effectiveness of conference notes. For example, a few teachers had limited conference notes while others utilize conferences to provide feedback to students and identify their next steps. In addition, performance tasks, writing assignments, open-ended math problems, and experiments are graded using a school-wide rubric. Students receive a level for each area of the rubric to determine what needs to be addressed for increased student achievement. However, the rubrics resemble a checklist providing limited feedback without

further explanation. Consequently, students aren't able to use this information to accelerate their own learning.

- Teacher teams analyze results of assessments to identify necessary adjustments in the curriculum in order to address students' needs. During the grade 7 team meeting, student writing from the Acuity assessment was reviewed to determine the implications for teaching and learning and whether revisions were necessary to the curriculum unit. From this analysis and discussion, teachers agreed that some students need further work on vocabulary development and isolating the main idea. However this discussion did not lead to specific actions that the teachers would take to execute these adjustments into future lessons. Within classroom lessons, teachers question students to check for understanding. Although a variety of questions were asked, often the same students responded and teachers did not probe for understanding of non-volunteers.. In one classroom, the teacher identified the students' difficulty with a concept and used different materials to further clarify student understanding. Other teachers state that they check student work to assess understanding and reteach skills as needed to the whole class or small group. As a result, adjustments to instruction are not always timely hindering student progress within lessons.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: P.S. 191 Amsterdam	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			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 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				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed