

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**John B Russwurm**

**Elementary School 197**

**2230 Fifth Avenue  
New York  
NY 10037**

**Principal: Natasha Spann**

**Dates of review: February 12 - 13, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves**

## **Part 1: The school context**

### **Information about the school**

John B Russwurm is an elementary school with 335 students from prekindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 64% Black, 31% Hispanic, 4% White and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 90.6%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school promotes students' social, academic, emotional and physical well-being, creating an environment that is conducive to learning. (1.4)
  - Academic and social achievements are rewarded during school assemblies and celebrated on hallway bulletin boards. After a review of the school survey and incident reports revealed safety concerns, a school-based vertical teacher team was created to foster the development of a positive school tone. The text "Lost at Schools" was purchased and is used by the team to study and develop strategies for a specific group of students who display inappropriate behaviors. As a result, the team is presently devising a comprehensive school wide plan and their efforts are already demonstrating results based on a decline in behavioral outbursts exhibited by specific students. Additionally, student leaders from College for Every Student (CFES) frequently meet with the principal and during one such meeting expressed the desire for enrichment activities. To accommodate this request, every Friday afternoon students now have the opportunity to participate in varied self selected enrichment clubs such as photography, chess, cooking and robotics and third grade students are planning to participate in a student organized safety patrol. As noted in the student meeting, these initiatives bolster their self-esteem and the growth of their leadership skills. These efforts also result in a reduction of online incident reports, enabling students to value differences and learn in an inclusive environment that is conducive to their needs.
  - The school's small class sizes enable every student to be well known by school faculty who help support their academic growth with tutoring and small group intervention strategies. The attendance team frequently reviews attendance and guidance reports to note trends and areas of need. Outreach efforts result in phone calls and home visits. Additionally, this data analysis informs plans for added supports from Harlem Children's Zone (which has placed AmeriCorps participants in classrooms to assist teachers), Carmel Hill Fund (which has contributed to the growth of classroom libraries and formative assessment tools), Swim for Life (where students learn vital water safety skills) and Harlem Junior Tennis. Such community-based partnerships provide after school tutoring, recreational and family support services and integrate with school-based guidance services to meet the needs of targeted students and their families. These efforts result in an increase in monthly attendance rates and increased motivational aspirations to succeed as noted in student and parent meetings.
- School leaders develop and share clearly articulated goals with the school community to support social-emotional growth and foster student learning. (3.1)
  - The principal's performance objectives and school goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) focused on increasing student proficiency levels in English language arts and math align with school level action plans. The principal and cabinet members plan for the school year by reviewing outcomes from state

assessment data as well as the results of the School Survey and Progress Report. Goals are tracked and adjustments, (such as the daily block scheduling of 4 uninterrupted periods for ELA and math), made to address students' needs.

- School members help shape the school's goals which then are shared with teachers and families via the staff handbook and parent newsletters. The school community is cognizant of and embraces the school's plan for student improvement. Teachers set goals and at the upper grade level students are aware of their own broad learning goals and are encouraged to be accountable for their own learning. The staff has developed a list of struggling students as well as those requiring enrichment, resulting in targeted assistance during the day and afterschool. As such, there is a shared accountability resulting in commitment to needed improvements such as the increase in students performing at proficiency levels as evident in the school's goals.
- School leaders are developing systems to communicate high expectations to staff and students in order to promote adult learning and prepare students for middle school and future college readiness. (3.4)
  - Families receive a monthly calendar detailing school events, meetings and weekend student instructional and enrichment supports. Student achievements and success are celebrated on bulletin boards and during assembly award ceremonies. Although school leaders are not yet utilizing a formal, systemic method used by all staff to provide feedback to families, some individualized teachers develop their own, in order to share written feedback with parents. The school's partnership with Touro College's Scrub Club encourages students across grades to develop an interest in professional health careers. Faculty and medical students visit the school and share career readiness tips with students. Additionally, the school's CFES partnership fosters academic and personal growth by providing each CFES student scholar with an older role model who mentors and helps coordinates visits to colleges such as City College and Roger Williams College in Rhode Island. One student, after reflecting on the impact of CFES, stated that "CFES influences you to work hard and go to college." Some students also shared the names of several colleges they would eventually like to attend. As a result, selected students in the program demonstrate heightened levels of awareness and career aspirations.
  - The principal through the daily electronic message, faculty conferences and cabinet meetings, shares her expectations and instructional focus. Training is provided to staff by network personnel and teachers are beginning to share strategies with each other during grade planning meetings. This school year teacher leaders meet monthly with administrators in order to share minutes and agendas from weekly team meetings. School administrators are at the infancy stages of creating individual and team accountability measures to improve teaching practices and student learning.

## What the school needs to improve

- Improve instructional practices and develop challenging academic tasks across classrooms to ensure that students demonstrate higher order thinking skills and are fully engaged in their learning. (1.2)
  - Data-driven flexible grouping for instruction is evident in a minimal number of classrooms. Most teachers do not clearly model skills and strategies; they ask general, low level questions and strategies do not encourage student-to-student collaboration. As a result, conversations are more often of the basic question and answer format between teachers and students. Moreover, questioning strategies do not effectively provoke deep levels of student thinking, thus limiting students' ability to engage in high-leveled classroom tasks and discussions. Although the workshop methodology with mini lesson, modeling and independent practice is evident in some classrooms, most lessons and tasks are not rigorous. For example in one 4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, students played with the math manipulatives and struggled with understanding the concept of fractional parts, while, in a third grade classroom during the read aloud, questions were literal and students recited facts which required little thought. As such, student work products, including those of English language learners and students with individual education plans, demonstrate that most students are not engaged in higher order thinking. In addition, extension activities that stretch the thinking of higher achieving students were rarely evident across grades and subjects. This further limits this relevant sub-group of students from being challenged and to be reflective thinkers so that they perform to their highest ability level.
- Enhance the work around curriculum analysis to develop consistent alignment of key standards and Common Core tasks to increase rigor and higher order skills and cognitively engage all learners. (1.1)
  - At the beginning of the school year, school leaders and staff deliberately adjusted the curricula in order to make changes to the math scope and sequence and to integrate CCLS into math units of study. Staff are in the process of further adjusting the English language arts curricula in order to ensure that it is fully aligned to the standards. As a result, most students do not routinely cite text to support their verbal and written arguments and the school is missing out on incorporating curricula that addresses its widening achievement gap between the lowest and highest achieving students.
  - Curricula and academic tasks emphasize higher order thinking skills in approximately three classrooms at the lower grade level. However, these practices are not yet evident across all grades and subjects and are especially lacking at the upper grade levels. Additionally, teachers do not consistently utilize student work products to refine their practices. As a result, many teachers do not yet demonstrate the necessary skill level to cognitively engage students performing at varied ability levels, especially higher achieving students. Consequently, performance-based tasks that probe for deep understanding and application of learning are minimal and do not extend across all content areas and grade levels so that all students including English language learners and

student with disabilities are suitably challenged, are able to make personal connections to themselves and the world and are able to transfer their learning to new contexts.

- Ensure consistent use of varied on-going assessment practices and analysis of student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level. (2.2)
  - Although teachers use common rubrics during grade level planning meetings, rubrics are not consistently utilized by individual teachers to provide consistent feedback to students. For example in several classrooms teachers written feedback on students' work consisted of the words "very good" or "excellent." As a result, students do not receive adequate feedback on the quality of their work and they are not aware of the skill, strategy or specific knowledge needed to master concepts and further their own learning.
  - Grade level teams utilized the Common Core bundle assessments appropriate to each grade and they are at the beginning stages of planning the integration of the second common assessment bundle in their units of study. During planning meetings teachers analyze student work products. However, their approach is limited to identifying the individual needs of students and teachers do not yet systematically review these results to note larger trends and are not consistently using the data to make needed changes to the curriculum, student groupings and their instructional practices in order to better advance student learning and close the widening achievement gap between the lowest and highest achieving students.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: John B Russwurm	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 <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>							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed