

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Independence School

Elementary 02M234

**292 GREENWICH STREET
MANHATTAN NY, 10007**

Principal: LISA RIPPERGER

Dates of review: March 18-19, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Mariano Guzman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

P.S. 234 Independence School is a/an elementary school with 827 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 3% Black, 8% Hispanic, 71% White, and 14% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 13% 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 96.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has strategically created a rigorous curriculum across grades and subjects, aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) filled with opportunities for student inquiry in all content areas thereby meeting the needs of all learners. (1.1)
 - The successful constructivist social studies and science project-based approach that has been traditionally associated with the school has been fully developed into a rich, interdisciplinary curriculum with connectivity across all core subject areas. Beginning in Kindergarten with text analysis and dissection, the school's instructional focus on pushing students' ability to support what they think and believe based on evidence from text and the work they are doing is consistent in all classrooms. Student work products in verbal, written and artistic forms of expression provide teachers with a way of assessing rigor as well as a guide to adjusting lessons. This was distinctly observed, during a math lesson as a teacher allowed students to present their method for solving an algorithm. Four methods were presented and explained by individual students with the class giving their reactions and posing questions. As the teacher was about to move on, a fifth student started to introduce another way of solving the equation which she thought would be more visual and understandable by all. As she introduced her approach, she became absorbed in thought. Respectfully, the teacher recognized the student's attempted solution as a moment for praise and informed her that when she had gathered her thinking and felt ready to express, she should present again. Moments later, the student presented a wonderfully visual solution that was immediately understood by all and noted by other students with strong approval and appreciation. This Socratic approach as well as respectful teacher practice provides students with the freedom to take risks and the understanding that self-reflection can deepen understanding and abundantly represent the school deep understands and commitment to student inquiry.
- Across all grades, pedagogical practices are differentiated and aligned to the curriculum, reflecting a belief on how students learn best that ensures all students access to content and the ability to produce meaningful work products. (1.2)
 - Across classroom teachers implement an inquiry-based approach to learning that encourages students to be actively involved, pursue their interests, share their opinions and questions at the start of each unit and make connections with their own experiences. Critically important to this work and present throughout the school as well as in the work of teacher teams are high expectations of what constitutes deep understanding from students. Students are constantly pushed to support what they think and believe based on evidence from text and the work they are doing. This focus provides a coherent strand throughout all content areas: writing about reading, narrative and non-narrative texts, or in math, by providing defending statements that articulate why something works or does not work. During a third grade social studies lesson on the roles of animals in the lives of Native Americans of the Eastern Woodlands, students were expected to argue the following in writing: Whether the white-tailed deer was indeed the most

important animal to the Native Americans of the Eastern Woodlands. Following a recapping of the previous day's work and a short video, the teacher assessed understanding through focused questioning, always pushing students' to support their statements. Working in partnerships, and with rubrics in hand, students then went off to write an argument following their reading of narrative text which they use to find supporting evidence. For a group of students additional video time was provided and they received a graphic organizer to support them in their writing. Another group of students were asked to read a different text independently and look for evidence that would help them discuss the following question: How did Native Americans feel about their animals? Embedded as part of inquiry in every lesson, students are encouraged in all classrooms to want to find out things for themselves and to present their findings through evidence based discussions and writing. This self-learning applies to all students at the school and is an integral extension of research skill development—a key element of the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE) and college readiness. This student-focused approach underpins teaching practice throughout the school and allows for multiple entry points with student specific supports built into the curricula for all learners. As a result, all students feel safe to take risks, and are provided with the opportunity to present their work.

- School leaders make informed and highly effective organizational and instructional decisions that elevate coherence of practice across all aspects of the school to support success for all student populations. (1.3)
 - The school currently employs two full-time coaches in Literacy and Math and several consultants with very targeted areas of responsibility: Teachers College works with the school several times a year providing reading support, Gay Su Pinnell in devoting independent levels of reading, Goldmansour and Rutherford in working with diverse student needs, Fundations staff developer to work with phonemic awareness for K-3rd grade, and Seravallo Assessment that focus on 4th and 5th grade literacy. Most significantly, the school has also managed to continue to provide a rich arts curriculum replete with dance and instrumental music. The impact of this work is evident in the work products produced by students. For example, following a study of colonization, a special education student shared the video he had directed and produced which focused on two individuals, in period garb, presenting differing points of view during a discussion on slavery. In addressing concerns regarding progress of special education students, the school implemented a macro philosophical shift in having the entire staff accept responsibility for all students' progress, with the principal—having previously worked with Kristin Goldmansour—personally monitoring the growth of Special Education students. This shift has led to structural changes including the elimination of 12:1:1 classes with all IEP students with Individualized Educational plans in Integrated Co-teaching (ICT) classrooms. This focus on strengthening instruction for students with disabilities as a school-wide responsibility was the focus of a school-wide retreat followed by monthly professional development that centers on identifying the particular strengths of the ICT teams' general education and special education teachers, as they design learning stations for their classroom.

The school has also made a significant investment in adaptive materials to assist students with special needs in their learning. In classrooms throughout the school, Rifton chairs have made it possible to accommodate students with sensory issues as well as those for whom sitting can sometimes be a challenge. Trampolines in out-of-classroom locations throughout the building provide students with the ability to release their energy in productive ways. These adaptations have become matter-of-fact at the school and have been adopted by all as unremarkable. In taking these actions, the school has managed to eliminate the underserved stigma that often follows children with special needs and has created a truly inclusive environment.

- Across the school community, adults and students, maintain a culture of mutual self-respect that supports the personal and academic growth of all students (1.4)
 - The school's mission is to provide an education that fosters the intellectual, social, creative, and physical growth of each student in a safe and nurturing environment. The school strives to empower each student to achieve his or her greatest potential and inspires students to use that potential for the benefit of others and the world. The school's Theory of Action frames all conversations about learners and their strengths with problem solving using those strengths to address their challenges. The goal is to create a more tolerant, inclusive, and positive learning environment where all can succeed. Additionally, over the last two years, the school has been studying and researching approaches to Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and working to incorporate a model that is consistent with the school's philosophy and mindful of a community of families that value independence, citizenship, self-reflection, questioning and opinion, and most important the development of student voice. To this end, an SEL study group researched and piloted curriculum recommended by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). After piloting three different curricula, the school selected Responsive Classroom (RC) as the curricula to implement starting September 2012. The school's commitment to this work is demonstrated in the professional development that has already taken place with sessions beginning last summer, followed by Election Day and during a weeklong institute at the school. Moreover, an RC leadership team made up of eight staff members, schooled in RC, meet regularly and have already introduced school-wide rules and a discipline codebook for teachers that outlines possible student infractions with ways to respond other than sending students to the office. In addition, the school's long-standing commitment to a social studies enriched curriculum is pivotal in providing a construct for SEL that is rooted in student ownership and responsibility. This work continues to build a strong community of respectful learners with every child well known to almost every adult in the building—reinforced by the school's tradition of looping teachers. As evidence of their engagement, 99 % of teachers and 100% of parents responding to the NYC School Survey questions on Safety agreed or strongly agreed that they felt safe. Similarly, 98% of teachers

and 83% of parents responding to the NYC School Survey questions on Respect agreed or strongly agreed that they or their children felt respected.

- Teachers participate in collaborative inquiry and professional development focused on improved achievement, strengthening instruction and increasing learning outcomes. (4.2)
 - School structures for improvement of student outcomes create a unique foundation for teacher teams to engage in vertical planning and discussion. For example, the school organizes teachers on a two-year grade span K/1, 2/3, 4/5. As such, teachers have a unique understanding of content and how to organize instruction for more than one year of teaching, leading to richer and deeper conversations regarding specific students at grade team meetings. Combined with the school's focus on Special Education reform and RC, they are poised to discuss student work from through multiple lenses. This well-developed distributed instructional expertise was evident in the teacher team meetings observed. In one meeting, led by a coach, teachers were asked to bring both verbal quotes from a student explaining their understanding of the work as well as written pieces illustrative of high, middle and low student work. They were also asked to bring unit of study benchmarks. The ensuing discussion initially focused on the high-level work as an exemplar was contextualized using a rubric to assess and norm common understanding of the work. This approach proved to be tremendously powerful, as it provided a way of analyzing and detailing what was missing from the middle and low-level artifacts. It further provided a framework to discuss individual students and how they might be supported in improving their work through multiple entry points. The student verbal quotes provided additional insight regarding alignment of student verbal expression and demonstrated written comprehension and allowed teachers to discuss and share questioning techniques that might be employed in the classroom to better assess a students' true understanding of the content. As a result, teachers left with an agreed upon understanding of what constitutes high level work and techniques to apply to their practice and specific insights on how to scaffold instruction to provide access for all students.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen the use of formative assessments that are closely aligned to key standards and linked to the curriculum for student subgroups. (2.2)
 - Although great gains have been made with significantly impaired Special Education students, maintaining progress has been challenging as well. Another challenge faced by the school is that its students' verbal skills are so strong that they can be misleading as to their actual comprehension levels. Mindful of this pressing need for improvement, the school has taken many measures to pinpoint ways that it can improve its student growth scores. For instance, the school purchased the Seravallo Reading Assessment System from Scholastic, to provide better understanding of third through fifth grade students' true reading comprehension. Teacher

teams and individual teachers throughout the school use questioning, running records, rubrics, conferring notes and performance task results to guide grouping decisions, adjustments to lessons and shifts in practice. Some teachers have made strong connections between the use of data, their student population and their practice and can clearly articulate modifications in their lesson planning to meet the needs of all students. However, this practice is not consistently strong throughout the school and defines a need for further development specifically aimed at aligning assessment to classroom instruction. Hence the analysis of student progress and the identification of trends are not fully realized and there are some missed opportunities in consistently providing tailored supports or detailed next steps that are clearly understood by all students to improve their learning thereby hindering some opportunities for student progress.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: P.S. 234 Independence 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