

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**Neighborhood School**

**Elementary School M363**

**121 East 3<sup>rd</sup> street  
Manhattan  
NY, 10009**

**Principal: Milo Novelo  
Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Neighborhood School is an elementary school with 315 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 17% Black, 29% Hispanic, 41% White, and 13% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. 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

- Teachers share a strong belief system about how students learn best and they actively engage all students in learning with effective supports. (1.2)
  - Teachers plan and implement lessons using the workshop model of instruction, flexible grouping, and differentiation strategies to ensure learning by all students. Pedagogy in the classroom is informed by the Danielson Framework whereby teachers promote students' independence to ask big questions and persevere in tasks. Furthermore, teachers and staff share beliefs about "children as sense makers" when students are encouraged through questioning and active learning experiences to make meaning. For example, students in a combined prekindergarten and kindergarten class built a complex and vast block structure based on sketches they had seen and they pointed to bridges, tunnels, and courtyards to articulate clear reasons and functional purpose of the architecture. Moreover, in several math lessons, students engaged as small groups in games like "What's Missing?" and "Roll or Unroll a Square," with each group practicing different addition and subtraction strategies to problem solve. Teachers supported and pushed students' thinking with questions like, "Does that make sense?" and "Show how you know?", and students responded in turn-and-talk to their peers. As a result of teachers varying instruction to meet students' multiple learning styles, students demonstrate high levels of participation, stamina and deep engagement in their learning.
- Principal, teachers and staff nurture a respectful and inclusive culture that promotes academic and social-emotional growth for all learners. (1.4)
  - All stakeholders describe this school as instilling core values of "community, respect, diversity, and responsibility" into students' learning experiences. For example, the school hosts family conferences in lieu of parent-teacher conferences, with children participating in and, in many cases, guiding the conversation about their learning progress. Similarly, students celebrate monthly traditions of a whole school sing-along and "open work time" whereby students visit each other's classrooms to engage in crafts and other choice work. Moreover, students in upper grades take annual overnight trips to a farm or nature camp as validation that important discovery happens outside the bounds of a school building or typical school hours. These and many other events support the school's culture of mutual trust, team building, diversity as a feature that is embraced instead of tolerated and positive relationships. As a result, adults and students consider themselves as partners in learning and students demonstrate exceptionally strong skills of advocacy and feedback in discussions, interviews, and presentations.
- Teachers use a sensible range of assessment tools to reveal student strengths and challenges and support their efforts to individualize instruction. (2.2)
  - The school has adopted a literacy assessment system with organized folders of student work following each child across grades, as well as common assessments of reading accuracy, sight word recognition, and spelling progress in early grades and Fountas and Pinnell reading levels in upper grades. Teachers follow the Teachers' College calendar of writing units and assessments with adjustments to the fiction-nonfiction balance, and then they track class and individual student progress via summary sheets. For

example, in a grades 1/2 summary sheet for "How To" informational book writing, the teacher notes what each student has done well and what specific improvement to work on next. This detailed and consistent approach to monitoring students' literacy development, known by staff as an example of "sorting," has improved the effectiveness of conferring with students and writing processes. Although students learn in multi-age classrooms for most of their day, the exception is what teachers call "math streaming," where students work in grade-specific math groups using TERC Investigations. This involves complex scheduling and coordination, and the math groups function well in meeting all students' needs, due in large part to productive cycles of assessment and instructional planning. As a result, students benefit from interventions, including extended day programs, which improve their reading, writing, and math progress.

- The principal provides meaningful feedback to teachers from classroom observations that improve pedagogical capacity. (4.1)
  - Two years ago, over 40% of teachers expressed dissatisfaction on the School Survey regarding the frequency and usefulness of observational feedback they received from the principal. This became a key priority for improvement by the school leader and he formulated an ambitious plan to make and support explicit expectations for pedagogic practice. Teachers now set pedagogic goals that align with the school's overarching goals and individual competencies connected to a research-based framework for teaching. Frequent cycles of observation measure progress toward reaching pedagogic goals and teachers receive far more effective and actionable feedback that details next steps for improving instructional practice. The principal and professional development committee analyzes data from observation cycles and student achievement outcomes in order to plan relevant workshops, intervisitations, and staff development. As a result of these focused efforts on instructional feedback, teachers state verbally and via survey that their observational feedback is much improved. Furthermore, an analysis of formative and formal observation data, as seen in written reports and evident in classroom visits, indicates growing competency among teachers in using leveled questioning to engage students in meaningful discussion, thereby moving the school toward reaching its overall goals.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Develop written curricula and tasks both to capture the history of students' rich learning experiences and to ensure that all students are challenged to think, write, and problem solve at high levels. (1.1)
  - For years, teachers have developed social studies-based curricular units that feature students' choice of topics, build upon an underlying question or curiosity, and push students to discover through active thinking and engagement. Students and families talk with pride about this constructivist and progressive approach to learning and cite examples of the built environment in grades 1/2 and New Amsterdam and Museum study in grade 3. However, it is only in recent years that there have been school-wide efforts to formalize curricula into written units of study with emphasis on reaching Common Core Learning Standards and creating rigorous academic tasks. The early elementary grades have achieved good success in developing meaningful unit plans and tasks, but less so in grades 4/5. Half of

the school's students with disabilities are in grades 4/5, and, as a group, they have made minimal academic progress due in part to inconsistencies of rigor of their curricula. For example, the social studies lessons in these grades seem to jump illogically and superficially from U.S. government system to the Dust Bowl and then to the Iroquois nation. Moreover, as of yet, there is still no easy way to access or share curricula across all grades and subjects, although several teachers utilize Google Docs as a shared electronic platform. This variation in curricular development limits how deeply students make sense of their learning and leads to uneven student results.

- Strengthen the work of teacher teams by communicating clear vision of purpose, roles and expectations and providing supportive expertise to maximize student learning.  
(4.2)
  - The principal promotes shared responsibility and ownership for the work of the school by empowering teacher leadership through the newly-created Special Education Coordinator position, through participation in committees (such as retreat, professional development, and extended day), and through weekly teacher team meetings. However, some teachers state that they do not know clearly the purpose, scope, or intended outcomes of their collaborative work. For example, the Instructional Cabinet of teacher liaisons from each grade meets weekly for over an hour with the principal, yet some members express frustration at fairly loose protocols and direction. Similarly, grade level teams meet regularly to review student work and plan curricula and performance tasks together. However, teachers note that at least one teacher team has needed greater supports, including outside consultants, in order to meet productively. As the school has hired more new teachers in recent years, the role of teacher teams has become increasingly vital for teacher mentoring and coherence of the work of the school, yet some teachers feel that the teams are not achieving potential. Consequently, opportunities to improve teacher capacity and student outcomes through teamwork are hampered.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Neighborhood School	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