

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**Nathaniel Woodhull School**

**Elementary School Q035**

**191-02 90<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11423**

**Principal: Mark Dempsey**

**Dates of review: January 9 – 10, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Lenon Murray**

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

### **Information about the school**

Nathaniel Woodhull School is an elementary school with 680 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 40% Black, 29% Hispanic, 4% White, and 23% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 94.1%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school offers varied and challenging curricula, including the arts, aligned to key State standards, so that all students are engaged in their learning. (1.1)
  - The school leaders and teacher teams actively use the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to align their curricula to its defined competencies and devise units of study. Their curriculum maps include instructional shifts that promote writing across all grades and require close reading and continuous referrals to texts to support inferences. The teachers use the Junior Great Books program to provide material that pushes their students' thinking. Students are required to write in complete sentences and coherent paragraphs. Teachers coach into these skills using graphic organizers and mentor texts to systematically build a foundation for college and career. As a result, students' academic vocabulary has significantly expanded as demonstrated in their thematic writing.
  - The school has intentionally focused on escalating the level of the academic tasks to promote rigorous habits. For example, the school has introduced Singapore math to expand the depth of problem-solving available for study. Students zero in on key words that provide clues to the required solution. Teachers encourage multiple approaches including drawing diagrams, creating graphs and charts and utilizing geometric manipulatives. Also, in one class, a grade 5 literature circle was effectively facilitated by students with the encouragement of the teacher to include text discussion that promotes critical thinking and accountable talk. English language learners and students with disabilities are supported in small groups as needed and by paraprofessionals and push-in teachers. This student participation in higher-order text-based discussions results in high levels of cognitive engagement as indicated in their written reflections.
- A clear set of research-based beliefs about student learning results in consistent, quality instruction that provides appropriate challenges aligned to students' achievement levels. (1.2)
  - The teachers have embraced the ideas in the Danielson rubric and adopted instructional strategies with particular attention to questioning and a range of varied approaches to classroom assignments. For example, in a grade 4 science class, the teacher set up six work stations and pragmatic tasks to teach students the concept of electricity. He asked, "How was everyday life different before electricity was invented?" In a grade 1 English as a second language class, the teacher showed a short video of the hatching of an egg to illustrate sequencing. An art teacher used Keith Haring-inspired figure drawings to support her second-graders in describing and sharing their emotions. As a result of these consistent, school-wide instructional practices, the students have consistently demonstrated a minimum of 10% improvement over three months on their developmental reading assessments.

- School leaders and faculty effectively use a wide range of assessment data to guide student grouping decisions and inform planning, resulting in instructional adjustments and student improvement. (2.2)
  - Teachers use rubrics as both an assessment and a teaching tool across all grades through the various units of study. For greater precision the school has moved from Fountas and Pinnell to developmental reading assessments for benchmark purposes. Unit assessments in Everyday Math and newly introduced Singapore math track student progress in numeracy. Students' written responses to texts have also been a rich source of data. Teachers devise their own assessments by grade to check levels of comprehension of essential topics as they are taught. The feedback thus obtained is used to assign students to Achieve 3000 web-based applications that are tailored to their areas of need and available to them at home. The reading program currently in use is also accessible online to students and families. Students receive continuous feedback on their performance and coaching on how to improve in their specific assignment as well as homework. This has resulted in teachers making adjustments between read-alouds, small group work and even the selective use of photocopies of texts to adjust and tailor their instruction.
  
- The school offers varied professional development opportunities emerging from a research-based, common teaching framework that deepens adult learning with a focus on improving classroom instruction. (4.1)
  - The school leadership uses formal and informal classroom observations to provide targeted support for teachers. The CCSS are integrated with the Danielson rubric, and low inference observations generate the feedback to teachers. Teachers are encouraged to rate themselves against the rubric and engage in meaningful dialogue with administrators about their next steps for improvement. A kindergarten teacher, for example, disagreed with the principal's conclusion following an observation. The resulting dialogue made deep use of the rubric and brought them to a mutual understanding. The principal promised to return to see the area of engagement under discussion. Examples of student work, including writing, problem solving with clear explanations and in-class assessments, are marshaled as evidence of progress. As a result, teachers have a common language and instructional focus that has improved their classroom practice.
  - Teachers set individualized goals in the fall in consultation with their supervisors. They participate in professional development with network specialists, respond to informal observations, meet with their colleagues formally and informally on teams and benefit from intervisitation in other classrooms as needed. The variety of professional development opportunities has been developed in response to teacher surveys and expressed needs. Written teacher observations demonstrate a movement towards open-ended questions and comments that support student discussion in class. This approach enables the leadership to provide more targeted support to teachers in the context of the Danielson framework and has improved their professional practice according to the rubric.

## What the school needs to improve

- Expand the long-range thinking at the base of the strategic organizational decisions that support the school's instructional goals in order to improve the quality of students' work products. (1.3)
  - The long-range plans for the development of the school are created by the school leadership team and embedded in their Comprehensive Education Plan. The school leadership has provided substantial time for teacher teams to meet and time for academic intervention for students both after school and during the school day. The computer lab has been re-opened and upgraded with more advanced computers. Coaches still work with teachers both within and outside their classrooms. The school has invested heavily in recent purchases of materials that, although potentially useful, are not yet fully aligned to the CCSS. This lack of effective alignment shortens the useful life of these materials and, thus, inhibits the advance of student work towards full mastery of the CCSS.
- Improve the communication of academic progress and next learning steps with students and their families so that clarity of expectations leads to effective partnerships and acceleration of student learning. (3.4)
  - The school communicates high expectations to the faculty connected to the instructional shifts needed to more fully implement the transition to the CCSS. The principal sends a detailed newsletter by email to each member of the faculty at the end of every week; he has not missed a single issue since the summer. The school also provides students and families with information about the challenges inherent in the new State standards. Family workshops are held monthly and teachers communicate to parents weekly through notes, flyers, phone and email. The majority of teachers provide feedback on student work. However, not all student work includes specific suggestions for improvement. Parents do not usually have sufficient concrete information about their children's specific strengths and areas of need to fully support student work at home and contribute substantially to the improvement of student outcomes. As a result, students cannot always clearly articulate what they need to do to guide their improvement and accelerate their learning.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Nathaniel Woodhull	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			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>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>