

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

The Chris Galas School

Elementary –Middle School 047

**9 Power Road
Queens
NY 11693**

Principal: Ann Moynagh

**Dates of review: May 23-24 , 2013
Lead Reviewer: Dr. Evelyn W. Castro**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Chris Galas School is an elementary/middle school with 215 students from Pre-Kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 0.93% Black, 8.3% Hispanic, 87.44% White, and 3.26% Asian students. The student body includes 1.86% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 92.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and teachers articulate a data-based rationale for the focus on key standards as evidenced in rigorous curriculum tasks to close the achievement gap and promote a college readiness. (1.1)
 - Emphasis in the school according to the Comprehensive Education Plan is on key standards and the integration of Common Core Learning units of study including the citywide instructional shifts and the alignment of curricula across grades. Lesson plans reviewed across grades and subjects reflect an emphasis on curriculum which is coherent and embeds key standards across subjects and areas of growth have been identified. There is an effort to close the gaps for all students including English Language Learners (ELL) and students with disabilities (SWD). For example, three Common Core units in English Language Arts (ELA) are aligned to Social Studies and Science units of study. An ELL completed a specific teacher-directed project in which she showed her research on Pilgrims and the writing process to create a work product that revealed her findings. Another grade 8 student who participated in the Socratic Circle on War Crimes and the Atomic bombing in Japan used the article from the NY Times which was the basis of discussion translated in Polish. Additionally, documentation of maps and performance task planning in mathematics focusing on measurement showed alignment across grades and an emphasis on real life problems. Consequently, there is a clear understanding what content knowledge is needed for a student to exit one grade and move to the next scaffolding information from one grade to the next. The teacher curriculum planning to create Common Core aligned units of study to improve rigor and engagement resulted in improved benchmark assessment results using Fountas and Pinnell scores this year, consequently, closing the achievement gap and preparing students for college and career.
 - Teacher team planning sessions and agendas reveal work on revising tasks to make them more rigorous and challenging with a special emphasis on tasks for students with disabilities. Furthermore, in one classroom, there was a small number of ELL students involved in the use of the Socratic Method and were given material in their native language and guided through the lessons. They were observed to think accurately and with clarity and considered multiple meanings and interpretations of the rigorous material as was evident when studying the article regarding the dropping of the Atomic Bomb in Japan. The question examined by the students was, "Was it necessary to drop the bomb killing so many, or was it a war crime?" Curricula tasks such as performance-based math tasks on measurement were also observed such as whole number place value, patterns and graphs and expressions and equations across grades that challenge and engage all students including students with disabilities and English language learners, through scaffolding and critical thinking. As a result, student work demonstrates evidence of extended thinking and mastery of content.

- A unified belief system about how students learn best is informed by teacher team inquiry using a common, research –based teaching framework which helps teachers improves instructional practice and student achievement. (1.2)
 - Consistent instructional practices are offered by the school staff who shares a common belief about how children learn best. For example, in many classrooms, children are given an opportunity for hands-on learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate. The grade 2 social studies classroom included solving problems in the environment regarding recycling and overcrowding by using critical thinking skills. Additionally, teachers were observed planning a collaborative unit on Athens and Sparta that would allow the children to do research and then have discussions to deepen understanding and create higher level work products. Teachers and administrators interviewed and observed articulate how these beliefs are informed by a common research –based framework aligned to the curricula and shaped by teacher team input.
 - Across the school routines, questioning and teaching strategies and lessons are planned to provide supports and numerous ways for children to enter the curricula including English language learners and students with disabilities being given challenging tasks and critical thinking as evidenced by text talk time, peer reflections and self-reflections observed during classroom lesson visits. Teachers reviewed student work and used questioning consistently to promote higher order thinking skills in their questioning and teacher modeling to help children understand content. For example, in a research project in science the teacher was modeling for students how to narrow the topic, list what they know about clouds and what they would like to know about clouds and the weather and used questioning to elicit understanding. Engage students in the challenging tasks. Documentation of short, frequent teacher observations and actionable feedback on providing multiple entry points in lesson planning to promote higher level thinking was reviewed as well as observed in classrooms visited. These efforts result in high levels of student engagement and learning in class work across the school.
- School leaders make effective organizational decisions across all aspects of the school that are aligned to short and long-range goals to improve teacher practice and student mastery evident in meaningful student work products.1.3
 - Across the school goals focus on improved instruction and long-range, sustained improvement in academic mastery in all content areas. The principal hired a network instructional coach as assistant principal. The assistant principal and principal use their expertise in mathematics and English Language Arts to do professional development and supervision that increased the capacity of teachers to deliver improved instruction across subjects that will impact the students to improve academic mastery. To support the developmental growth of students and help families support their children, a team of staff members focuses on student needs especially those hardest hit by Hurricane Sandy. The team includes a guidance counselor, Substance Abuse Prevention-Intervention Services (SAPIS) worker, parent coordinator and family worker. This team does workshops, individual counseling of students and families and confers with individual teachers as evidenced by their logs, agendas and workshop materials. These strategic decisions to assign staff to support students and families positively impact

students as evidenced by incremental improvement in academic scores, and student attendance and achievement.

- The schools instructional goals and student learning needs are strategically supported by teacher teams that meet two to three times per week. Additionally, one teacher from each team is assigned to work on performance tasks two periods per week. Individual teachers are given per session to work on units of study and alignment to standards. A curriculum mapping team works additional periods on developing and refining curriculum maps while grade 5 teachers, both general education and special education, are engaged in mainstream planning. Two teachers are assigned extra periods to work together to plan vertical professional development. This effective use of teacher planning and meeting time has improved pedagogical skills resulting in student engagement in challenging academic tasks such as student lead Socratic Circle discussions and math circus activities as observed during classroom visitations.
- The culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes evident across the school is carefully supported by faculty and staff, and results in student social-emotional and academic growth. (1.4)
 - The school's approach to building culture is based on a theory of action which leads to a confident, autonomous learner. To that end, the school uses Peer Mediation, Kids Connect, an active student council where students have a voice, bulletin boards that highlight student accomplishments. Student voice is reflected in minutes documenting the principal's meeting with students to discuss the school's self-evaluation points. Additionally, there is an emphasis on service learning that gives students an opportunity to mentor younger students, participate in making all school announcements on the public address system, and lead the school in contributions to Penny Harvest and beach cleanup, breast cancer awareness walks, a dance festival and other activities thus supporting a safe and an inclusive environment. Furthermore, the school has met the standards to have and sustain a junior honor society. Additionally, students randomly selected and interviewed in small group sessions, some were participants in service learning projects, are making academic and personal growth.
 - Each student is known well by at least one adult. There is coordinated team support from counselors and assigned school staff that affects attendance and socio-emotional learning. The school was relocated due to Hurricane Sandy, and 31 students who lost their homes never returned. The attendance is 92.7% due to continuous staff outreach. There is an emphasis by staff to teach organizational skills and do activities that promote self-esteem. An organized effort to raise awareness of the National Junior Honor Society has increased membership over the past three years at PS/IS 47. The counseling team provides youth development services, guidance advisement and student support services which positively impact student academic success. This is evident in the increased number of students admitted from the Chris Galas School to specialized middle school and high school programs.
- School leaders provide actionable feedback through frequent observation cycles using a research-based framework that leads to improved pedagogical skills and professional growth. (4.1)

- New teachers as well as faculty are observed using a research-based common teaching framework that outlines clear expectations for teacher practice and supports teacher goals. School leaders focus on teacher collaboration, and curriculum map alignment to the Common Core Standards. A log of professional development activities was reviewed, which documents efforts to improve teacher questioning and discussion techniques and using non-fiction texts across subjects and grades, and focusing on developing academic vocabulary with students. Peer inter-visitations as next steps are part of the documentation in an ongoing plan to improve teacher practice. Expectations are clearly articulated in each teacher's observation folder to align with the teacher's professional goals. Some of the professional goals reviewed in teacher folders include Depth of Knowledge question stems for practice writing, more rigorous tasks, developing questioning and discussion techniques. Observation and actionable feedback regarding these professional goals help to improve school-wide instructional practice, and positively affects student outcomes as evidenced in formative assessments. For example, formative assessment in grade 4, science and social studies show incremental improvement in student outcomes as well as assessments reviewed for grade 6 and 7 Acuity results in English Language Arts (ELA) and math. Furthermore, there is a transparent system for managing professional development. Teachers plan with school leaders and review data according to minutes of meetings held. Teachers are grouped and engage in professional development according to observation data. The school's theory of action which is documented in the Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) is to increase rigor and higher order complex tasks for students, in order to make them proficient thinkers at challenging tasks and ultimately independent learners. Minutes of meetings of the instructional cabinet reveal decisions based on data that include teaching assignments, and professional development to improve learning outcomes for students. Minutes of meetings reveal an emphasis on early childhood curriculum and a plan to change and departmentalize some 5th grade classes to provide expert teaching as part of a plan for school improvement. This system which links professional development, the school's theory of action and the teaching framework has led to improved student outcomes across grades and subjects according to formative assessments reviewed.

What the school needs to improve

- Enhance common assessment practices so that all teachers make effective curricula and instructional adjustments to meet student needs. (2.2)
 - School teams work diligently to create and/or use common assessments including teacher-made assessments, Acuity, Response to Intervention (RTI) benchmarks, Fountas and Pinnell running records, and writing genre of the month assessments. However, in some classrooms teachers are not consistently using all of the common assessments to track progress and instructional progress toward particular learning goals to include ELLs and SWDs. For example, in one classroom a student was able to produce work at a higher level, however, was not being challenged as he completed an integrated learning assignment. As he shared his portfolio of work, he commented that he was able to finish all the steps of the integrated lesson assignment because it was "easy" for him and some of the students he was

working with. During this class, the teacher did not monitor closely the students' ability to move through the assignments and then adjust the curricula according to the students' needs. This lack of tracking progress, adjusting curricula and making instructional decisions for all students including SWD and ELL students hampers opportunities for increased student mastery in specific subject areas.

- Many classrooms visited use wipe-off boards, small-group instruction, data folios, conference notes, quick checks, and exit slips as strategies for ongoing checks for understanding. However, there are some classrooms where, although there is varied use of checks for understanding, students cannot articulate their next learning steps. This hampers opportunities for all students to move to the next level in their learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: The Chris Galas 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