

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

PS/MS 147 Ronald McNair

PreK-8

**218-01 116 Avenue
Queens, NY, 11411**

Principal: Anne Cohen

**Dates of review: January 15 - 16, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Deena Abu-Lughod**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

PS/MS 147 Ronald McNair is a preK-8 school with 745 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 94% Black, 4% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 95.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Structures to enhance input in school decision-making have resulted in an improved climate that fosters the academic and personal growth of students and adults. (1.4)
 - The school has responded well to survey data to improve the school's learning environment, creating new venues to involve students in the building school culture. Monthly town halls anchored in essential questions such as, "What kind of community are we?", are prepared in collaboration with the student literacy club and advisory group, and have engendered explorations of solutions to problems ranging from bullying to modification of the dress code to how to improve the use of the eighth period. Additionally, the guidance counselor and dean established procedures to monitor behavior and attendance closely, and work diligently with families to follow up on chronic cases while network staff has provided professional development to help teachers promote improved classroom behaviors. New students are paired with buddies at the start of the school year who demonstrate appropriate behaviors in the playground and lunchroom. As a result of these efforts, the number of incidents has declined, dropping from 51 to 30 to 14 in the September to January period over the last three years consecutively, and attendance improved by 2% last year.
- The school makes organizational decisions that promote improvements in student learning. (1.3)
 - The school aligns its resources to provide some strong supports for the instructional program. The school adopted some Common Core-aligned units and purchased the suggested texts to facilitate their effective implementation. In addition, many classrooms are equipped with projectors to enhance instruction with videos and visuals, as well as document projectors that some teachers use effectively to model skills, such as annotating text and for sharing exemplars. This year a former classroom teacher is assigned to a cluster position as a science teacher, using a new lab that is equipped with materials for hands-on experiments. Two new partnerships with the New York Junior Tennis League and Embrace Ya Kidz provide an array of afterschool activities that complement the academic program. As a result, student work products reflect the school's curricula and a wide range of academic and social interests.
 - Effective scheduling practices support both student and teacher development. The eight-period day allows 7th and 8th grade students to receive Spanish instruction daily where they produce high quality and creative work and many 8th grade students meet daily to prepare for the Algebra Regents exam. High interest and engagement in both these subjects enabled over half of last year's graduating class to obtain high school credit. Furthermore, teacher teams meet Tuesdays to look at student work and share strategies so that individual teachers can better meet the needs of targeted students. Some teams meet daily during their common prep periods to collaborate informally or under the guidance of teachers involved in leadership programs for more focused work on data-

driven instruction. In addition, the upper-grade assistant principal meets weekly with content teams, and a vertical team meets Thursdays to deepen their understanding of the Common Core standards and the Danielson framework for teaching. The former math and literacy coaches along with a classroom teacher have departmentalized the 3rd grade. As one of them explained, "This allows me to adjust the lesson before the next class," thereby increasing the prospects that this year's third grade students will outperform those of last year. As a result of various teams' work, changes in pedagogy are beginning to extend across classrooms to improve instruction, academic task development and student engagement.

- Common assessments are beginning to enable the school to measure student achievement and evaluate academic needs in order to inform instructional decisions. (2.2)
 - The school administers multiple types of common grade-level assessments, such as Acuity baselines and benchmarks, running records, end of unit exams, and common culminating assignments for their literacy units. Teachers who are skilled in conducting item analyses are building the capacity of their colleagues to use data to guide support for targeted students in afterschool tutoring and to assign additional work on the Acuity website. Teachers are beginning to consider how these results reflect on their own instruction and could inform curricular decisions with respect to creating tiered tasks and grouping which takes place in some classrooms. Furthermore, thought-provoking quotes from the monthly community book prompt students to write opinions, providing a rich source of performance data which is contributing to the school's ability to regularly evaluate student progress and harvest next steps for instruction. For example, an overall weakness in introductory paragraphs led to the development of a "recipe" for strong introductions. As a result of these emerging improvements in data analyses and interpretation, teachers are becoming more purposeful in adjusting curriculum and instruction based on student data.
 - The school is advancing efforts to establish regular use of rubrics. Most posted work is accompanied by various rubrics, some of which are aligned to the Common Core standards. In some classes, students use rubrics to guide their work and teachers' comments align to rubric ratings so that these students can work more purposefully. In some cases, students add reflections, committing themselves to implementing a next step, such as "adding more details" in their next project, although they rarely receive such feedback during the drafting stage. Additionally, the school has recently collected the teachers' diverse grading policies to create a school-wide policy so that classroom grades can serve more reliably as common measures of student learning. These initiatives have improved the school's prospects for evaluating student achievement and using results to inform instruction and curriculum.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that the rigor of units and tasks across content areas reflect the standards and prioritized shifts to increase the level of thinking so that all students are fully prepared for the demands of college and career readiness. (1.1)

- Last year, the school implemented the NYC units of study in English Language Arts across the grades, ensuring alignment of at least one unit to the Common Core and the instructional shifts. The school also purchased units purported to align to the new standards. While the principal states that the school is focusing on the reading standards related to key ideas and details, teachers were not fully aware of these priorities. As a result, curriculum maps, in grades where they do exist, do not fully reflect the school's key standards, thus limiting the impact of instruction on student mastery. The former math coach used the NYC Department of Education's guidance to align the lower grades' Math Connects program to the Common Core standards. However, because teachers were only tangentially involved, they were unable to articulate how that alignment reflected the expected major work of the grade, key standards or the instructional shift for fluency, conceptual understanding and application. In turn, misalignment occurred, such as the learning target in a grade 5 lesson that aligned most closely to a third grade standard. The lack of participation of teachers and teacher teams in the scrutiny of curricula in relation to the new standards reduces their ability to act purposefully to raise the level of academic tasks thus hampering prospects for rigorous student work products by all students.

- The art teacher carefully constructs meaningful projects that connect closely with the content areas and shares her rigorous criteria with students, resulting in high levels of student engagement and well-deserved pride in their work. In addition, the new assistant principal designs stimulating tasks for the school's community books that require critical thinking skills and interpretation, and that make connections across content areas. However, other tasks require little more than loose, personal connections to texts, and lack of scaffolding for research projects results in "cut and paste" from digital sources, with little expectation that students critique and interpret multiple sources in original writing. The absence of common understandings of what constitutes rigorous habits and higher order thinking results in uneven opportunities for students to engage in academically challenging learning activities that produce meaningful work products.

- Strengthen teacher pedagogy so that teachers consistently develop high level questions and provide supports to ensure that all students engage in discussions and tasks that enable them to produce high quality work. (1.2)
 - School leaders believe that students learn best when provided with "appropriately challenging open-ended questions and tasks," modeling, clear learning targets, and active engagement through accountable talk. Most lessons had clear targets, some teacher modeling, and opportunities to "turn and talk", and there were some strong models in the upper grades. For example, a grade 6 teacher urged students to re-read to revise their initial thoughts regarding a text about technology and learning, and asked, "Where should I be looking in the text?", modeled marking the text and prompted them to use sticky notes to track their thinking before completing a "T chart" as a scaffold for organizing their written response. When a grade 8 English teacher observed students incompletely summarizing the video, she prompted them to include three key words, enabling them to meet the expectations of the Common Core standard for a more complete summary of key details. However, not all classrooms reflected the school's purported emphasis on layered questioning and tiered tasks, or the shift to text-based evidence as required by the citywide instructional expectations. In some math

classes, poor pacing, over-modeling and lack of routines reduced time-on-task as some students invested 15 minutes in copying the task or waiting for teacher attention. Furthermore, student notebooks revealed inconsistencies across classrooms in the volume and frequency of authentic writing, indicating limited expectations for students to demonstrate their thinking. In all classes, teachers mediate all discussions, and students lack protocols to support stronger student-to-student interactions. The absence of agreed upon instructional practices for both faculty and school leaders results in uneven levels of student thinking and participation as evidenced in inconsistencies in higher-order thinking skills in student work across the school.

- Create a school vision inclusive of data-driven goals that connect identified needs to actions and specific, monitored interim benchmarks so that all initiatives contribute effectively to school improvement. (3.1)
 - The school has experienced considerable success in its long-standing goals in relation to improving the school's learning environment. Having established a positive school climate, the principal has limited this year's goals to implementation measures, such as teaching the required number of Common Core aligned units and norming teacher and supervisor ratings of videos of teaching. However, these goals are not explicitly connected to improvements in student achievement, where the goal has remained defined as a "3 percent increase" in the percent of students meeting the State standard in ELA and math. Despite considerable differences by grade and subgroup in the rates of improvement, this goal is not differentiated, thus limiting the school's ability to monitor progress, celebrate success and replicate promising approaches. Teachers' goals for students vary greatly. While one team aims to move 12 of the 15 targeted students to 80% mastery on a baseline assessment, another team aims for a 34 percent increase in the percent of students at grade level. The absence of specific targets and interim benchmarks, and action plans that link the implementation goals to student achievement prevents the school from capitalizing on its revitalized climate to accelerate learning.
 - School leaders have developed some systems for regularly collecting some sources of data, such as running records and student work, which is allowing them to understand the impact of some new initiatives, such as multiple readings of sets of short texts. The rapid increases in comprehension that teachers say have resulted from this practice reinforce their enthusiasm. However, the school lacks a professional development plan that can phase and stage the introduction of new school-wide practices in a more deliberate fashion and respond to data-driven pedagogical needs. For example, the norming on videos where teachers observed questioning and discussion techniques is not connected to training on how to generate structures for text-based small group discussions, and support for questioning has been limited to the distribution of Webb's Depth of Knowledge wheel. Teachers leave the building frequently for professional development from network and external providers and share what they have learned at meetings, but these efforts are not considered an integral part of a larger plan to build staff capacity. As a result, there are missed opportunities for more strategic and sustainable teacher development and improved practice

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: PS/MS 147 Ronald McNair	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