

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**Samantha Smith School**

**Elementary School Q182**

**153-27 88<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11432**

**Principal: Andrew Topol**

**Dates of review: March 14 - 15, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Beverly Ffolkes-Bryant, Ed.D.**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Samantha Smith is an elementary school with 835 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 15% Black, 45% Hispanic, 2% White, and 37% Asian students. The student body includes 39% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. 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 maintains a supportive learning environment and has high expectations for learning and behavior that are clearly shared with parents and students, leading to academic and personal gains for students. (1.4)
  - The school's student council meets every two weeks, performs community service activities, has created monthly newsletters for families, initiates school fundraisers and has become a part of some decision-making at the school. In addition, two of the school's goals are to provide students with the support in becoming independent, critical thinkers, and to promote a safe positive environment for all members of the school community. In an effort to meet these goals, the school began planning a Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) initiative in the spring of 2011, which has grown tremendously in the last two years. The focus of the initiative is to develop a positive tone in the school community and reduce the number of disciplinary incidents. The PBIS team, which includes classroom teachers, special education teachers, cluster teachers, a guidance counselor, a social worker, the parent coordinator and the assistant principal, created lessons for teachers to explicitly teach expected behavior to students, who are rewarded for exemplifying such behaviors. The positive environment allows students to increase their focus on academics. Based on the School-wide Information System (SWIS), a web-based software system that collects and gives schools a summary of office discipline referrals in schools, and Online Occurrence Reporting System data, the number of disciplinary incidents has significantly decreased, resulting in a school environment that supports the academic and personal needs of students.
  - Staff recognize the importance of supporting students academically, socially and emotionally. Thus, through a grant from the Child Center of New York, the school hired an additional social worker whose primary responsibility is to provide professional development and family outreach. She is a support to staff for crisis intervention, and has created supportive lunch groups for students that cannot tolerate the activity found in the typical lunchroom. She was proactive in seeking various colleges and university to get social work student interns at the school who provide an additional 32 hours a year of support to students experiencing emotional, social and academic difficulties as well as assisting teachers, students and their families. For example, students who have difficulty controlling their impulses and have poor social and coping skills meet with her and the social work interns in small groups. At the request of several families, she works with the Family Resource Center of Eastern Queens to provide a support group for those parents whose children have social-emotional issues. Along with PBIS initiative, this has enhanced the learning outcomes of these struggling students; they are in class more, engaging more positively with their peers and, thus, more engaged in meaningful learning, as evidenced in the decrease in the number of SWIS referrals for student behavior and a decrease in the number of student suspensions from the previous year.

- Staff welcome opportunities to participate in collaborative inquiry and professional development and use this to strengthen instruction. (4.2)
  - Various teams across grades working in inquiry groups encompass the vast majority of teachers in the school. For example, the grade inquiry team looked at students who were reading one to two levels below the reading benchmark level and have passed the decoding part of that assessment but not the comprehension part. These students were then given a pre-assessment test to determine which students might benefit most from a quick intervention. Each teacher on the inquiry team chose to focus on three to five students this year through a six-week inquiry cycle. Within this process, the teachers analyze student work using the Tuning Protocol and give formative assessments on an ongoing basis. Teachers then use the results to identify trends and share strategies to help these students as well as others. They also report that the student discourse is more robust and rigorous as a result of implementing these strategies, as evident in the frequency of student-to student discussions when visiting classrooms. While Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a greater focus in third and fourth grades, this is being used across the school, opening new learning opportunities to all learners. Additionally, there were numerous classes observed in which students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, discussed complex texts and evidence. These are both Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) aligned tasks and a main focus of the inquiry work across the school, resulting in coherence across grades and providing data-driven support that addresses student needs.
  - The principal strategically assigns teachers to various vertical teams in the school in order to promote their leadership skills. In the past, teams, studies and the work of the school were designated and directed from school leadership, but now teachers play a much greater role in setting agendas and leading their own teams. Assignments to the English language arts and math teams were determined mostly by lead teachers. Cohort representatives on the English language arts, math, and inquiry-study vertical teams were determined by teacher acumen, the level of training received and which teachers showed leadership and excellence in their work with their individual grade cohorts. This shared leadership has led to a school-wide structure of identifying, assessing and targeting student needs so that they may work to increase student learning outcomes. For example, staff recognized that they did not have sufficient quantitative data in math, which limited their ability to identify areas of need and track student growth. In response, teachers formulated unit-specific performance tasks to track common criteria across units and grades. This has already impacted student learning by providing math teachers with common data and language to collaboratively plan targeted instruction and to group children according to their instructional needs.
- The principal has established effective systems for school self-evaluation and modification of practice with a clear focus on improving student learning. (5.1)
  - The use of data binders allows for effective collection of tasks aligned to the CCLS, running records, Teacher College assessments, longitudinal information and other data that teacher teams analyze throughout the year. In addition, there is a team binder that contains agendas, minutes,

research articles, exemplars, student work and data that are used to identify students in the lowest third for targeted instruction and intervention. The targeted student groups are fluid and teachers revise them after subsequent assessment results. Teachers also analyze successful lessons based on data and then adjust the curricula, professional development and instructional supports accordingly. Administration conducts three to four data meetings a year with each teacher to decide upon instructional next steps. All this work together results in the collection and use of meaningful information on instructional practices to accelerate student growth.

- Members of the school community have been working diligently on fostering a positive tone and atmosphere in the school building through the PBIS initiative that fosters positive behavior and a healthy social and emotional development in all students. The PBIS team has been tracking the effect of this initiative over the last two years using SWIS, which gives schools accurate, efficient, practical information for decision-making about school-wide discipline. SWIS also allows for the school to identify problem behaviors by location, students, and month and, as such, has proven to be an invaluable tool in guiding the PBIS team. As a result of this initiative, principals' suspensions have dropped 32% from this time last year. The guidance counselor and two other teachers on the PBIS team have attended the Teachers College Inclusive Classrooms Project (TCICP) and have developed a plan for addressing behavior issues during recess. One teacher on the team has launched the grade 3 and 4 student council with her cooperating teacher, and they actively integrate PBIS initiatives with them. PBIS provides student-to-student collaboration and interaction, which is essential for the program to pursue the CCLS expectations. It makes the students challenge, question, critique and build upon the thoughts of others, which contributes to a reflective, collaborative community that grows leadership capacity as well as focuses on improved student learning.
- Students benefit from a standards-based curriculum including art and technology with multiple resources that support student learning. (1.1)
  - Based on teachers' comments on the 2012 School Survey where they voiced that the school's curriculum, instruction, related services and assessments were not aligned, the school revamped most of the curriculum during the June planning meeting. Teachers, with the help of the reading coach, looked at Teachers College units to see if they were aligned to the CCLS and what needed to be supplemented. Teachers also looked to make sure that their units and assessments would match to the State examinations since it was the first year the school had an upper grade. As a result of these close examinations, in addition to the curricula now meeting the mandates of the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE), teachers not only aligned science and social studies to their literacy units but have also infused the close reading of complex text, contextual shared reading using science and social studies texts across curriculum maps and cluster teachers now assign writing tasks in science. As a result, teachers are better able to align the school's curriculum to meet the CCLS as well as the CIE, resulting in accelerated progress towards reaching learning targets.

- The school is part of a partnership with the TCICP, a spin-off of the Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project that provides instructional and research supports so that all students, including students with disabilities, can improve their literacy skills. Teachers in grades 3 and 4 receive cycles of professional development on UDL, which focuses on making curricula accessible to all students. Using UDL, grades 3 and 4 special education teachers plan their units infusing multiple means of representation into the lessons including small-group instruction, matching independent and partner work. Teachers also use technology, manipulatives, visual and audio texts that address the needs of visual and auditory learners as well as English language learners. Consequently, these teachers critically examine the standards in order to design differentiated activities to accelerate student learning, as evident through the simultaneous use of technology, oral discussion, chart supports, math manipulatives and written material during lessons observed.

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

- Extend the practice of using formative assessments to create tasks that provide rigor and challenge to students to maximize student learning. (1.2)
  - Students in classrooms observed were highly engaged in student discourse, adhering to the school's goals. In addition, students were in groups receiving support from the RTI and English as a second language push-in teachers. However, the assigned tasks are not rigorous and do not challenge students across grades and content areas. Similarly, some student notebooks and work folders did not show evidence of tiered supports to ensure consistent progress for struggling learners. Consequently, teachers do not know what students have learned, or how well they have learned targeted content and skills, or if immediate intervention and clarification can benefit the progress of those students.
- Extend data gathering and analysis practices to all core subjects in order to provide a complete picture of students' progress across all aspects of the school. (2.2)
  - According to the School Self Evaluation Form, teachers increasingly use exemplars and rubrics with students to promote understanding of assessment data. Although rubrics are evident in many classrooms, they are mainly generic and are not consistently matched with detailed comments made on student work. In turn, students cannot understand the next learning steps needed in order to improve their work. As such, these common assessments cannot be used to consistently differentiate instructional strategies, which hamper the school's capacity to explicitly identify individual students' strengths and areas of need.
  - It is the school's policy for all teachers to use ongoing checks for understanding after all lessons. However, in classrooms observed, there were few examples of this, and student self-reflection varied as well. The lack of these assessment practices inhibits teacher teams and individual teachers from identifying more granular strengths and needs of all students in order to make targeted adjustments to improve outcomes.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Samantha Smith	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>