

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

The Elizabeth Blackwell Middle School

Middle School 210

93-11 101 Avenue

Queens

NY 11416

Principal: Rosalyn Allman-Manning

Dates of review: January 30-31, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Michele Lloyd-Bey

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Elizabeth Blackwell School is a middle school with 2,071 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 7% Black, 60% Hispanic, 4% White, and 29% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 14% 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 93.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and teachers align curriculum to State standards that effectively engage a diverse group of learners in common core units of study that result in improved academic performance. (1.1)
 - With the support of the school's Children First Network, school leaders and staff revised curriculum maps to ensure alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), and embedded the units of study and instructional shifts. Based on the analysis of benchmark assessments, the school emphasizes writing, numeration and operations with fractions and measurement. The leadership and teacher teams closely collaborate and regularly evaluate curriculum maps and other planning documents to ensure that rigorous questions and assessments in all content areas are noted, and effective resources, such as non-fiction texts, align with performance tasks. In a grade 7 intermediate English language learner class, students work with a partner in a hands-on math measurement lesson, calculating the volume of a sphere in order to make predictions and solve problems through real-world learning experiences. Teachers across the school engage students in challenging tasks that push their thinking based on higher order questions, and students are expected to thoroughly explain their answers. As a result, all students, including subgroups, are focused strongly on college and career readiness. The school's 2011-2012 Progress Report indicates that 9th grade credit accumulation of former 8th graders for this school is 89%.
 - The leadership and staff intentionally focus on improving rigor in all grades and content areas by developing students' academic language. Student writing has improved as reflected in their monthly writing benchmark essays where more sophisticated vocabulary is noted in all grades. Further, students ask and respond to analytical and evaluative questions during instruction that is prevalent across the school. In the Advanced Regents classes in grades 6, 7 and 8, students use prompts in order to ask higher level questions, and literature circles enable students to facilitate their own learning through higher-order questioning based on rich reading experiences. Evidence of higher-order skills is reflected in a grade 8 literacy class where students analyze and mimic the author's craft through a text-based discussion. Consequently, students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, are able to make meaning of what they learn in class and solve real-world problems that are emphasized in the curricula.
- Teachers engage students in rich learning experiences that reflect their strong belief about how students learn best and result in increased student engagement and higher-order thinking for all students. (1.2)
 - Across the school, students work in pairs or in small learning groups. Their work together maximizes learning as they build on each other's strengths. Teachers use knowledge gained from professional development by focusing on three domains of the Danielson Framework to ensure that higher order questions are asked throughout all lessons. Further, teachers focus strongly on planning and preparation, and to

deepen the level of rigor, the school engages in Habits of Mind, focusing on specific habits such as metacognition. They effectively model lessons and use formative assessment data to identify the kinds of support students need to accomplish each lesson. This is reflected in the manner in which students are assigned to flexible and fluid groups based on skill level and individual need. Classrooms reflect materials and activities that are carefully matched to the needs of students, such as the use of graphic organizers, leveled readers and hands-on activities in science and math. Teachers use a variety of strategies, such as “stopping to rephrase questions” that improve student’s ability to think more deeply about their work. In a grade 6 literacy class, the teacher modeled a writing activity using an “Elmo”, a technological reading document, and an authentic writing sample about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Students were strategically paired according to skill need and the teacher further engaged students in individualized conferences to provide targeted skill assistance. Students used peer-editing checklists and effectively supported each other throughout the lesson. As a result, teachers across the school are able to articulate the learning needs of students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, and successfully assign challenging projects and tasks that are scaffolded to provide multiple entry points and improve their learning. Consequently, the 2010-2011 Progress Report indicates that the school only received additional credit in 2 areas. For the 2011-2012 school year, the Progress Report reflects additional credit in all areas, validating the work that the school is doing with subgroups.

- School leaders make deliberate and effective organizational decisions that result in thoughtful use of resources, student groupings and teacher collaborations in order to ensure that students produce meaningful work products. (1.3)
 - With the support of PENCIL, an outside organization whose role is to inspire innovation and improve student achievement by partnering business leaders with public schools, the school implemented a mentoring program for girls. The principal comments that the use computer-generated tools improves student motivation, and as a result, technology, such as digital cameras, document readers and SmartBoards, is evident in classrooms across the school and effectively engage students in activities that promote the expectations of the CCLS. The leadership and staff effectively analyze a wide range of data and identify trends in math where students struggle, such as number sense and operations. Teachers meet weekly on grade and vertical teams where they discuss students’ needs and use protocols to examine student work. The grade 8 math team closely examines the skill analysis of the math benchmark assessments and discusses common errors in each grade. As a result, the school maintains its “Good Standing” status with the State, and the 2011-2012 Progress Report indicates that 95% of students taking accelerated courses in all subjects passed. Moreover, the leadership ensures that teacher hiring clearly reflect the needs of students. For example, the school funds five teachers to work with English language learners. To strengthen the instructional program, the special education teacher support service teachers are assigned to push into classes and reduce the student to teacher ratio, while providing direct support to struggling learners. Hence, thoughtful programming allows staff to provide targeted instruction to students and improve their performance as indicated on improved rubric aligned student writing.

- The leadership has an effective system to portray the pedagogic needs of teachers and provide feedback using a common framework that result in clear next steps regarding teacher practice. (4.1)
 - The school continues to strengthen its work in teacher development by implementing the Danielson Framework as their research-based rubric. The principal maintains a detailed spreadsheet that clearly delineates the types of observation that are required and received by each teacher. Tenure decisions are closely monitored as teachers begin to organize their portfolio that is used in the tenure decision process. A comprehensive professional development plan ensures that every teacher receives ongoing and targeted support in improving pedagogy and student achievement. During the principal's cabinet meetings, each assistant principal shares information regarding teacher development within their "house" and, collectively, they strategize how to effectively support staff, including new teachers who receive mentoring support. Teachers receive short frequent observations, informal and formal observations with feedback that help them advance to the next step. They are further supported through the development of study groups as well as during one-to-one conversations with the coach, Network support staff, and the leadership. The principal shared how a new teacher was moving towards receiving an unsatisfactory rating. She described how the alignment between the observation process, the professional development and ongoing feedback based on written and face-to face conversation with the United Federation of Teachers Teacher Center support specialist, and the leadership led to improvement in the teacher's practice. The teacher is now on track to effectively manage her class and her students are making progress in responding to higher-order questions as per the teacher' training in Danielson.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen the manner in which school-level decisions are used to purposefully evaluate and adjust sharing information to parents in order to further support the expectations of the CCLS. (5.1)
 - School leaders and faculty have created processes, such as faculty conferences, instructional team and cabinet meetings, to evaluate school culture and guidance support on issues such as on bullying and high school admissions preparation. In order to strengthen parent involvement, parents have access to teachers through the parent coordinator, guidance counselors, the leadership and email. The Parents Association has been steadfast in its efforts to increase parental involvement by holding regular meetings that focus on the goals of the school. However, while parents comment that there has been an increase in parental involvement, parental activities specifically as they relate to the expectations of the CCLS remain a work in progress, limiting parents' ability to support their children at home.
 - School leaders provide various opportunities for teacher teams to meet regularly in order to engage in the inquiry process to evaluate and adjust student work as it relates to the CCLS and, specifically, the performance tasks. While teacher teams make suitable adjustments, such as creating

rigorous tasks and rubrics that support the expectations of the CCLS, they have not yet purposefully evaluated the quality of their work, resulting in diminished identification of strategies that improve student mastery of the CCLS for all students.

- Refine curriculum-aligned assessments to include student self-assessment that enable the school to further determine the progress of all learners and adjust curriculum and instruction. (2.2)
 - The school uses a wide variety of standards-based assessments such as Acuity Benchmarks and authentic classroom assessments. There are uniform assessments in social studies and science, where teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses in content and skill areas, and teachers comment that the use of specific graphic organizers supports them in breaking down concepts into smaller chunks in order to support struggling students. Additionally, Teacher's College reading assessments are administered three times a year, and students not doing well based on their Lexile levels are given small group intervention services. Computer-generated assessments that are aligned with the school's reading and math invention programs support a diverse group of learners by enabling teachers to electronically track student progress and make immediate decisions regarding curriculum and instruction. Exit slips and ongoing checks for understanding, such as interim questioning and writing and math checklists, allow students to effectively assess their work independently and with peers. Further, assessments used across the school support teachers' ability to redefine student groups and make daily effective adjustments to lesson planning. Teachers develop and use content specific rubrics in all subjects. In one case, information gained from the use of rubrics provided teachers with information about students' performance in math, enabling them to include additional strategies in order to teach fractions. Teachers across the school take the pulse of their class by continuously monitoring student understanding of the lesson. Lesson monitoring is indicated in lesson plans, such as in grade 7 literacy lesson, where the teacher constantly made use of strategies such as turn and talk to a partner and stops and jot prompts about the analysis of characters in the text. However, not all teachers engage students in student self-assessment. Thus, changes in classroom practice so students have a deeper understanding of their next learning steps are limited. Also, at this time, assessments are not used by the school in a way that provides a clear picture of students' progress towards learning goals. Thus, the school is limited in its ability to measure student mastery towards the goals in order to make instructional adjustments so that all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, demonstrate increased mastery.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: The Elizabeth Blackwell 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