

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Louis Armstrong

Middle School Q227

**32-02 Junction Boulevard
Queens
NY 11369**

Principal: William Fahey

Dates of review: May 28-30, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Dr. Philip A. Composto

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Louis Armstrong School is a middle school with 1617 students from grade 5 through grade 8. The school population comprises 15% Black, 41% Hispanic, 29% White, 14% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 96.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well-developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- A rich curriculum across all subject areas align to key standards and engage all learners providing opportunities for students to engage in rigorous tasks that promote higher order thinking. (1.1)
 - School leaders and faculty reviewed the citywide instructional expectations and attentively analyzed data from the New York State English language arts (ELA) and math exams, school-wide benchmarks, Design Your Own (DYO) assessments, formative and summative assessments to determine common trends. From this analysis it was determined that changes in curriculum alignment, increased rigor and application to real world situations was necessary to assist students in becoming college and career ready. In grades seven and eight, students are required to take a college and career readiness course (CCR) where they participate in a career exploration fair and speak with career professionals in their areas of interest. As a result, students wrote essays indicating their most interested career choice that included research related to the required educational level necessary and developed an action plan to achieve their career goal. Teacher teams work together to create Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) aligned curriculum maps, literacy-based common assessments, units of study and performance tasks across grades and subject areas to close the achievement gap and increase rigor, that includes multiple entry points, enabling students with disabilities and English language learners access to achieve standards. For example, math teachers are using the Concrete, Representation, Abstract and Write (C.R.A.W.) method which allows students to enter tasks from a concrete, representation or, abstract level and then write about the process used to solve real world problems. Fifth grade students were actively engaged in a task of creating a town, where they used manipulatives, and pre-labeled landmarks on graph paper. Higher performing students used blank graph paper to ensure critical thinking and increased application of skills. As a result, these real world performance tasks cement deeper conceptual understanding for all students. As a result, there is a 25% increase in student achievement from benchmark (DYO) assessments and students with disabilities and English language learners (ELL) demonstrating an increase of 20% on report card grades.
- The school's strong belief in improving student outcomes is evidenced in quality instruction that engages students in developing independent learning skills through high quality supports across all classrooms. (1.2)
 - Administrations conduct frequent mini-observations using the Danielson Framework for Teaching and provide teachers with low inference observation notes and discuss the components of the framework against the low observation notes. Teachers, with assistance of school leaders, develop next steps and action plans

to enhance their practice. Teachers across grades and subjects meet during common periods to plan and design units of study that incorporate activities with multiple entry points, to engage, challenge and deepen students' understanding at all levels. Questions are pre-planned using the depth of knowledge (DOK) matrix to elicit a range of complex responses from recall, skill concept, strategic thinking and extended thinking. For example, a seventh grade science class was observed working on understanding the parts and associated functions of the heart through the dissection of sheep hearts. Students' collaborative examination led to an explanation of how the physical structure of each part is essential to its function. Students with disabilities were provided with a visual picture of the heart, and English language learners were provided with the same picture with each part labeled. Higher performing students were required to synthesize information by answering extension question related to a defect in the heart and to cite possible causes and associated effects on the heart's function. Students were highly engaged in this activity, worked collaboratively to socialize intelligence and make meaning and associations between readings and real experiences. As a result of these real world applications, the number of student passing science on their report card has increased to 95%

- The deeply reflective principal uses all school resources strategically aligned to the school's goals and the Common Core focus that has significantly enhanced student achievement. (1.3)
 - The principal uses his knowledge of funding sources to maximize purchasing power. For example, where possible, reimbursable funding sources are used to purchase supplies. Tax-Levy funds support per-session expenses, resulting in a savings of approximately 38 % that enables the school to purchase additional instructional equipment and materials for classrooms. 90% of all classrooms are now equipped with document cameras and each floor has a laptop cart containing 16 laptop computers. Teacher teams meet a minimum of two times a week and use protocols to examine student work, identify gaps in learning and adjust curriculum and instruction. Department teams then meet to strengthen content by examining student work and develop high level tasks with access point for all learners. This ensures that all students are able to work to achieve their goals. Grade teams meet with the guidance counselor and assistant principal to discuss individual student progress, where a rounds protocol is used to discuss performance of targeted students in each subject area. Intervention plans are developed to address the academic, behavioral, or social-emotional concerns. The guidance counselors arrange to meet with the at-risk student and include families to keep them informed. The principal empowers leadership throughout the school community to assistant principals, teachers and students, honoring his belief that "when people are empowered they take greater responsibility and ownership in what they are doing. We have smart teachers and staff who are creative and resourceful." This is exemplified in the hiring practices where a teacher interview committee, including an

assistant principal, interviews potential candidates. Demonstration lesson are observed by committee members of the top candidates. The principal then meets with the team to discuss their top choice. Consequently, when new teachers are hired, greater support is provided by committee teachers who serve as buddies, as they are invested in the candidate's success. Enrichment programs such as NYU Polytech Virtual Design, Robotics, New York State Science and Engineering Fair, are available all students. Students identified as English language learners (ELL) and at-risk students are offered opportunities to participate in the three day a week two hour ELL and NCLB after-school academies. Consequently, student performance increased 25% percent in ELA and math, as noted in the DY0 school level analysis. In addition, students increased their reading lexile levels using the Performance Series assessments. Students with the lowest lexile levels increased by 150 to 250 lexile points, thus illustrating that the achievement gap is closing for these students.

- The school is a safe place where students are engaged in learning and benefit from the effective support they receive for their personal and academic development. (1.4)
 - The school believes that all members of the school community must be NEAT: **N**ever be satisfied in pursuit of excellence, **E**veryone's participation is essential to our success, **A**ll students can learn and succeed, and **T**reat everyone with kindness and respect. To achieve this, all community members must consider possible choices and their associated consequences before acting. The school's safe and nurturing environment encourages students to grow academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. Confirmed during the student meeting, to ensure that they feel safe and comfortable, students are assigned a Guidance Counselor and Assistant Principal that remains with them throughout their time in the school, and are encouraged to speak with administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and school safety if they have a concern or problem. Students stated that they "feel respected by their peers and adults." In addition, the school supports students' voice and active participation through an elected Student Organization where representatives from each homeroom meet weekly to discuss school-wide issues. For example, students voiced that some peers could not eat lunch because of religious beliefs. Students voiced the need to offer a choice of vegetarian meals each day. As a result, the menu was expanded to include an additional hot and cold vegetarian item each day, allowing more students to enjoy and fully participate in the school lunch program. Additionally, it resulted in a greater awareness and understanding of cultural and religious diversity within the school community. After analyzing last year' suspension statistics, the school year was kicked off with assemblies that focused on Bullying, Cyber bullying, and Respect for All. Professional development for staff ensured a cohesive focus on these issues. Parents state valuing the workshops presented by a New York Police Department Community Outreach officer on internet safety and cyber-bullying and stated that they had a greater awareness of the need to monitor their child on the internet. To address the suspension rates, a guidance certified teacher, was

assigned to the Project SAVE room, an in-house suspension program, who works closely with parents, teacher teams, dean of students, guidance counselors, and assistant principals. As a result, of this concentrated effort and outreach, suspensions have decreased by 51%.

- School leaders support a high level of pedagogy through effective evaluation of instruction aligned to the Danielson's framework for teaching, resulting in strong teacher practice that improves student outcomes. (4.1)
 - School administrators conduct frequent cycles of classroom visits and walkthroughs applying the Danielson Framework with a focused lens to provide actionable feedback for best practices to teachers and support personnel. Administration support professional growth using a four tiered observation process of low inference observations, discussion, and identification of next steps and the development of action plans. For example, the school focus on questioning and Hess's Depth of Knowledge for crafting questions, showed an increase in conceptual understanding exhibited in teacher-to-student, and student-to-student conversations as noted in classroom observations. Furthermore, supervisors meet with individual teachers throughout the school year to monitor meeting professional goals towards improved pedagogy, allowing administrators to modify and differentiate professional development to meet the specific needs. For example, teachers expressed concern about the increased rigor and text complexity required of the Common Core Standards and their ability to check text complexity and a means to track an increase in students' reading levels. As a result, school leaders contracted with the Office of Achievement Resources to provide a consultant support teachers in how to use and maximize the benefits of the Performance Series System. In addition, the school's coach developed a professional development series of eight sessions to illustrate and support teachers in implementing close reading of texts. These combined efforts resulted in student growth as reflected in work products contained in student portfolios. For example, students' lexile levels increased by a mean of 50 lexile points on the Performance Series assessments between each assessment, with students with disabilities and English language learners showing an increase of 50 to 150 points each marking period. The culture of the school is that all members of the school community are life-long learners where teachers teams expressed to the reviewer they are "fully supported by administration and have a full understanding how changing their practice has had a positive impact on student learning." An analysis of data from written reports and classroom observations indicates that 95% of teachers are asking a range of questions which are geared toward higher level thinking in competency 3b using questioning and discussion techniques.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen teacher assessment practices to provide effective feedback in order to make instructional adjustments and offer clear next learning steps to improve student outcomes. (2.2)
 - It is evident that teachers celebrate students' best efforts through checkmarks, stickers and written comments and use this information to inform instruction. Teacher teams and individual teachers use English Language Arts and math item analysis information as well as performance series and interim assessment data to supplement summative data and identify student performance levels. Rubrics are used to assess student work and are attached to writing pieces included in work folders and on bulletin boards. However, the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment during instruction in order to make immediate adjustments to lessons is not strategically practiced across the school. This limits the school's ability to pinpoint and address the special needs of student subgroups within classes and modify targeted, differentiated interventions to accelerate learning. As a result, instructional strategies and learning tasks are not always strategically adjusted, hindering opportunities to meet the needs of all students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

| School name: The Louis Armstrong 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 | |