

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

The Active Learning Elementary School

Early Childhood

137-20 FRANKLIN AVENUE

NY, 11355

Principal: Robert Groff

**Dates of review: Oct 22, 2012
Lead Reviewer: Danielle DiMango**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Active Learning Elementary School is an Early Childhood School with 407 students from pre kindergarten through grade 3. The school population comprises 1.9% Black, 11.5% Hispanic, 3.2% White, and 82.8% Asian students. The student body includes 51.8% English language learners and 7.8% special education students. Boys account for 48.0% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52.0%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 96.29%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school strategically scaffolds the curriculum within and across grade levels to align to the Common Core Learning standards (CCLS) and addresses instructional shifts that promote deeper, more rigorous habits and close achievements gaps. (1.1)
 - School leaders and faculty have engaged in a rigorous process of curriculum development aligned to the CCLS that offers students a wide range of experiences and choices focused around real world connections for all students. Strategic planning within and across grades address student deficiencies in speaking and listening skills with scaffolds to include student needs revealed through a comprehensive needs assessment. Examples include a progression of literacy skills that begin with students expressing their opinion of stories they read in pre k, writing opinion and research studies in grades kindergarten and first, transitioning to “all abouts” and persuasion posters in grade 2 and culminating in a debate unit in grade 3. In math, students engage in math story telling in pre k. They must demonstrate computation values through pictures in kindergarten, develop computation skills in grade 1, write number stories to represent their thinking in 2nd grade and use picture models and graphing skills to illustrate number bonds and algorithms in grade 3. As a result of this coherent curriculum, school wide data shows that 84.6 percent of students are scoring at state proficiency in English language arts, a very large majority 90.4 percent are at proficient levels in math and a high percentage of students increase levels on the New York State English as a second language assessment test for English language learners each year.
 - To meet the needs of English language learners, a majority that make up 52 percent of the school population, all academic tasks include an oral language component to bolster student academic and social language skills. Units include language acquisition through play and oral and digital story telling. Additionally, instructional expectations focus around vocabulary frontloading, planning to incorporate classroom discussion and “turn and talk” strategies. These expectations not only require English language learners to demonstrate their thinking but also address vital high order skills at the early childhood level to address the needs of all learners.
- The principal strategically aligns resources to support the instructional needs of the school resulting in reflective curricula planning and continued student achievement. (1.3)
 - In alignment with school wide goals and high expectations around teacher practice, hiring procedures and teacher assignments focus on both pedagogical skill and a willingness to cultivate professional responsibilities through self reflection practices around teaching and participation in professional development and learning communities. The principal supports these collaborations by carving out common planning and inquiry periods two times per week and offering after school professional development sessions two times per month which are highly attended. Additionally, teacher teams are assigned by grade and include English as a second language and/or special education providers to support teachers with the infusion of skills within the curriculum, such as vocabulary through talk and to align detailed instructional strategies to meet the needs of these subgroups to foster accountability for students they have in common. This structure of staff time has led to teacher development of school wide instructional tasks aligned to curricular goals and active participation in learning experiences that is positively impacting student outcomes.
 - The principal is committed to providing students and staff with updated technology to enhance teaching and learning experiences. They are growing in technology through the use of SMARTboards, and iPads and iPod shuffles. Additionally, teachers use Google docs to share their curricular work and lesson plans. This work has led to increased student engagement in reading and writing about nonfiction texts and supports the school goal of engaging in professional growth opportunities through professional collaborations.

- The school community is committed to fostering an environment that promotes health and wellness and provides students with ongoing experiences to the world beyond the classroom elevating social and academic development. (1.4)
 - The community is committed to fostering social awareness and responsibility through student exposure to life experiences. Field trips and school assemblies are strategically planned to align to the school curriculum and school wide goals. Examples include trips to farms connected to non-fiction and writing tasks about animals and supporting students in growing their own vegetable gardens to teach sustainability. Students engage in fundraising events for Heifer International where they purchase animals to support hungry communities throughout the world. Additionally, the school has developed relationships with the Chinese American Parent Association; Cool Culture, and Queens Botanical Gardens. This dedication to promoting global experiences for students provides them with education beyond their front doors and elevates their learning outcomes.
 - The school has fully achieved a balance of internal structures and external partnerships to support their school vision that is centered on health and wellness. The community has pledged to expose students to the value of healthy habits and the impact it has on academic and social/emotional growth. They have sustained partnerships with Fan 4 Kids, New York Coalition for Healthy school food and have been recognized by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation as one of the top 1 percent of healthy schools in the country. They are one of two schools in the city that serve vegetarian only lunches and support students in campaigns such as; anti soda, healthy snack decision-making and the importance of getting enough sleep each night. Additionally, the school has built in time during each lesson for student movement and exercise. Families willingly participate in fitness workshops and health awareness week to reinforce school practices. As a result of this strong commitment to health and wellness, children are learning positive behaviors to take with them into their adult lives.
- Astute observation and feedback systems around effective pedagogy promote thoughtful reflection to support professional development and articulate expectations to elevate school wide practice. (4.1)
 - Since the school's inception in 2007, teacher evaluation tools have been developed and fully utilized to hone in on teacher strengths and next learning steps. The school uses "Tales Teacher Efficacy Rubric" to track teacher goals and instructional progress. Over the past year, the teachers and administration embedded supports from Charlotte Danielson's framework for teaching in order to align practices to the citywide instructional expectations. The principal uses the school's "Teacher Efficacy Check-in" directly aligned to the rubric, samples of student work from unit tasks and teacher professional development goal setting surveys to provide feedback to teachers. Professional development plans, established in collaboration and provided by outside staff developers, the principal and assistant principal support staff in identified areas of need. Additionally, the principal tracks teacher goals and measures growth within the rubric throughout the year. This focused work builds instructional capacity around school wide priorities and ensures teacher's professional needs are met so they are better equipped to support student learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Further develop teacher pedagogy around effective questioning, academic task implementation and providing strategic entry points for all learners in order to elevate student thinking and work products. (1.2)
 - Aligned to the curriculum and embedded within instructional practice throughout the school is the philosophy of student choice in learning and the establishment of a classroom environment that supports student "talk" and expression of their thinking. Much of academic task expectations centers on students engaging in detailed conversations around literature, nonfiction text and math processes. Across classrooms teachers consistently use questioning strategies and instructional resources to support the student's learning needs. However, they lack strategic design limiting full student engagement and rigorous learning tasks that reflect high levels of thinking and student ownership.

- Expand the use of common assessments to include feedback and self assessment practices for students so they can better articulate their strengths and next learning steps and teachers can make strategic adjustments to improve student outcomes. (2.2)
 - The school has developed child friendly rubrics and teachers have begun to explore effective ways to infuse their application as an assessment tool to gauge student-learning outcomes and to inform student expectations and their progress. However, currently there are no embedded or consistent feedback structures from teachers to students or self-assessment tools that provide clear next steps. As a result, students are uncertain of their areas of academic strength and weakness and cannot clearly articulate how their work products demonstrate their academic success.
 - Although there are fully established teacher assessment practices, such as teacher checklists directly aligned to the school's curriculum that capture student progress during lessons, information culled from this classroom data-keeping structure is not fully aligned to student work products or utilized at the teacher team level to make well-defined judgments regarding adjustments or next steps in instructional practice. As a result, the current assessment structure is not fully leveraging modifications in classroom practice to address the immediate learning needs of students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: The Active Learning Elementary 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