

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Public School 253

Elementary School Q253

**1307 Central Avenue
Queens
NY 11691**

Principal: Robin Johnson

**Dates of review: June 3-4, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Michele Lloyd-Bey**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Elementary School 253 is an elementary school with 491 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 47% Black, 46% Hispanic, 4% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 13% 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 93.00%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and teachers effectively align curricula to key standards and engage students in Common Core units of study, reflected in planning documents that cognitively engage a diverse group of learners. (1.1)
 - The school has built on the progress of the previous year and created a Citywide Instructional Expectation (CIE) team that uses data-informed processes to align curriculum and academic tasks to the cognitive demands of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). English language arts and mathematics are aligned to the CCLS, and literacy is emphasized across content areas. Teams have deepened their work to include the school's focus on key standards in writing, such as sentence structure for all learners, including English language learners, and students with disabilities. They also emphasize key English language arts strands in areas such as writing, identified from the careful analysis of summative data to improve student literacy and math proficiency. Dedicated collaborative teams engage in very detailed discussions regarding student performance, and develop and use curriculum maps and unit plans as a guide to address what needs to be taught in all grades and classes. Consequently, based on data informed processes, the school identified main idea of a text and having students explain how it is supported by key details as a major focus area to close the achievement gap, and winter to spring Acuity results indicate that all students in grade 3, including subgroups are making the greatest gains in literacy and math.
 - Adjustments to unit plans were made to include performance tasks in all grades, embedding key resources and creating smaller units in grade 5 to ensure that the needs of all students are addressed. Furthermore, teacher teams collaborate with instructional coaches and create thoughtful CCLS aligned unit plans that include significant elements, such as essential questions, big ideas and assessments and cognitively engage all learners. Additionally, students at all grade levels engage in activities that improve their comprehension skills. For example, in a grade 3 class, students participate in a literacy lesson based on the book, *Chrysanthemum*, by Kevin Henkes, and determine character traits, work collaboratively in small groups and write text-based evidence that support their analysis. As a result, student formative assessment s in writing is improving for all students including English language learners and students with disabilities.
- The principal's effective organizational decision making is focused on the instructional goals of the school, and improved teacher development that support students learning. (1.3)
 - The school has partnered with outside organizations, such as Addabbo Mental Health Clinic, and Queens Public Library. These close collaborations support the school's instructional priorities in their literacy and math improvement efforts for all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities. Teachers have the exact resources they need to instruct students. Non-fiction textbooks and

computer hardware and software support the academic needs of all students, as well as the instructional expectations. Teacher expertise is a determining factor in programming how staff works with students. Struggling students receive support at afterschool and Saturday academy from qualified staff members. Teachers have common prep periods, additional planning periods, and support staff push into classrooms and provide small group targeted instruction to emergent learners. Additionally, a dual language class supports the school's English language learner population. Consequently, staff assignments are designed to maximize improvement efforts by enabling teachers to meet weekly and analyze data, examine student work, design engaging CCLS aligned tasks and make adjustments, such as modifying graphic organizers that target the individual needs of students. Teams have established purposeful protocols, and as a result, there is a coherent and shared articulation of the school's instructional program and resources needed to promote student academic success and meaningful work products is evident in all subject areas.

- Teachers effectively use a wide range of assessments aligned to curricula and guides instructional decisions, planning, and adjustments that result in a clear trajectory of progress towards the goals. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams and individual teachers create rubrics that sufficiently align with the expectations of the CCLS. Customized rubrics result in effective teacher feedback and next steps for students. For instance, after the analysis of the grade 2's CCLS aligned performance tasks, the team adjusted the rubric to reflect enhanced "student friendly" language while ensuring that the criteria maintained academic challenge for students. Teachers also included more quantifiable statements so that the expectations were clearer and supported students in achieving success. As a result, assessment criteria is transparent, clearly written, and students know what is expected of them and can articulate it. In a small group meeting, all students articulate specifically how rubrics support them in their work. A grade 2 student announced, "I used my rubric (in writing), and I know what I had to do to get a good grade". Furthermore, the same student commented that based on his peer reflection, his next steps were to make his sentences "spicier". When asked what "spicier" means, he shared that he learned to add more details to his writing. Hence, student work products are improving as evident in work folders and display boards, and bulletin board displays.
 - Teachers and teams are able to clearly articulate reasons for the wide range of assessments that are identified and embedded in unit plans and align with key standards and the curriculum. Assessments provide information about the strengths and weaknesses of student performance and determine progress towards meeting the goals. For example, fall to spring Acuity benchmark results in literacy illuminated the trend across the school to strengthen the skill of "supporting point of view" and in math number sense and operations and fractions. During team meetings, teachers use the analysis of student work samples and chart implications for their teaching by identifying specific pedagogical strategies, such as developing vocabulary by using the Thesaurus and encouraging students to use "spicy words" in their writing. Consequently, Acuity benchmark assessment results from fall to spring have significantly improved, and

teachers agree that there is increased alignment of instructional strategies with assessments.

- The school effectively utilizes a research-based framework to monitor classroom observations and teacher development resulting in heightened pedagogical support and student performance. (4.1)
 - The school implements the Danielson framework, with a focus on coherent planning, questioning and assessments. School leaders engage in the observation of classrooms through short cycles of frequent observations, informal and formal observations. Teachers across the school, including those new to the school engage in inter-visitations that support school and individual teacher goals in response to the expectations of the CCLS. The leadership implemented a structured observation schedule that allows school administrators to visit classrooms regularly and provide focused and targeted feedback that is based on the observations of daily teacher practice and ensures that the pedagogic needs of teachers are addressed through targeted professional development. Teacher training is facilitated by the school's Children First Network (CFN) and the school's expert instructional coaches, and drive improvements in teacher pedagogy, that reflect a focus in areas such as the instructional shifts. Teachers have deepened their learning with one another, and grade 4 teachers' comment that they have strengthened their pedagogy in close reading that has improved student writing performance. Moreover, the leadership analyzes student work products during the observation of classrooms, and the analysis of student learning outcomes from Acuity and independent reading levels. Consequently, teacher teams collaborate and plan lessons, use protocols to examine student work, and identify effective strategies, such as the "red light model" that support grades 2 and 5 students in the lowest third improve their command of writing conventions.
 - The leadership's effective feedback captures the strengths and challenges of teachers, is immediate, and includes next steps that sufficiently align with the goals of the school, and has strengthened teacher practice in areas such as questioning. Furthermore, the leadership provides written, and verbal feedback that support teacher growth. During cabinet and instructional team meetings, specific support is discussed between the administration and coaches, and strategies for improvement, such as peer to peer coaching is identified. Hence, the timely evaluation of teacher practice promotes escalated awareness on student achievement and strengthens teacher pedagogy.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen the belief that all students improve from high quality instruction that consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula and reflect high levels of thinking in student work for all learners. (1.2)
 - Individualized student groupings are strongly reflected in English as a Second Language, and special needs classrooms. Differentiation of instruction is routinely based on Acuity's item skill analysis and formative benchmark assessments in literacy and math. Teachers plan together

during team meetings, and higher-order thinking is reflected in what the school calls, “HOT” questions (higher-order thinking) in their planning. Teachers are expected to activate students’ prior knowledge, and encourage students to make connections in their learning. For example, in a grade 4 special needs classroom, the teacher instructs students in a very engaging Common Core literacy lesson that improve students’ vocabulary regarding drawing conclusions and making connections based on their observation of photos. The teacher asked many higher-order questions that tapped students’ prior knowledge as students shared-out their responses in skill-based groups. However, there is little evidence across classrooms that teachers group students for instruction in a multitude of ways that reflect multiple entry points into curricula. Additionally, instructional practices that develop higher order thinking skills is indicated in planning documents, and discussed at team meetings, is not consistently evident across the school. As a result, students typically participate in lessons that limit their ability to be cognitively engaged in tasks at their appropriate level.

- Improve processes to regularly evaluate curricular and organizational resources to ensure that rigor is embedded in all classrooms in order to further the work of the CCLS for all learners. (5.1)
 - The school has been successful in strengthening its capacity-building practices by deepening the work of teacher teams, and expanding the leadership cabinet to include literacy and math Citywide Instructional Expectation (CIE) teachers. Teams employ a “student work analysis protocol” to evaluate student work, and use information gleaned from their analysis to make adjustments to curricula, such as including additional opportunities for students to write, and creating “student friendly” CCLS rubrics to address the needs of students. Documents maintained by teams, such as agendas and minutes are reviewed by the leadership. CIE teachers work closely with the leadership and regularly assess the progress and quality of the school’s curricula. Furthermore, instructional coaches share facilitation of teacher teams, and ensure that curricula are addressed in response to the expectations of the CCLS and the instructional shifts. However, while processes to evaluate and adjust instructional and organizational practices are in place, the work does not include the regular evaluation of teacher team’s work to guarantee that academic rigor and coherence is embedded across all grades and classrooms. As a result, responses to patterns in student work and data identified across the teams are less timely, stifling the acceleration of student mastery of the CCLS.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Public School 253	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