

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**A.C.E. Academy for Scholars
at the Geraldine Ferraro Campus**

Elementary School Q290

**70-02 54 Avenue
Maspeth
NY 11378**

Principal: Mieasia Harris

Dates of review: April 4 - 5, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Madelene Chan

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Elementary School 290 is an elementary school with 206 students from Kindergarten through grade 2. The school population comprises 2% Black, 40% Hispanic, 23% White, 30% Asian, 1% American Indian, and 4% designated as Other. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 13% 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 95.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The comprehensive school curriculum offers a wide range of rigorous, coherent learning experiences aligned to standards that supports high levels of student achievement. (1.1)
 - Across grades and subject areas, curricula are aligned to the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE) and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in order to cognitively engage students in challenging learning. Teachers are able to articulate a data driven rationale for all of the prioritized key standards such as reading with accuracy and fluency to support comprehension, and ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text. The school community is well versed in the criteria they have designed for students to progress to the next grade level. Results indicate that student success is due to the scaffolding of standards from one grade level to the next that are embedded in the teacher designed curricula. This was evident in the second grade reading curriculum that is embedded with third grade standards that teachers have identified as areas of growth, and areas that have the potential to close gaps for all students. Second grade results indicate that 84% of scholars are already on or above grade level in reading.
 - Curricula and academic tasks are planned to require all students to think succinctly and form rationales, emphasizing higher order thinking. Students are challenged and engaged with lessons that have a multitude of scaffolds and extensions enabling them to reach beyond their initial focus and think “out of the box”. Student work on every grade shows evidence of extended thinking and sophisticated thought processes. First grade math studies require responses that are shown in three different ways. Students posit that this protocol helps them understand and remember methods that have been taught to solve problems. Students solve two step word problems supported by their “I can” statement (I know when I can help a fellow scholar work through a challenge) at the end of each module. As a result, 87% of first graders have met the annual math goal on the mid-year benchmark assessment.
- The school’s strong shared beliefs about student learning is practiced by all staff in order to strategically meet students’ needs resulting in high levels of engagement and thinking. (1.2)
 - At P.S. 290, it is the universal belief that all staff and scholars are reflective practitioners and according to the school’s theory of action or creed, “can do all things and become anything we dream...If we believe and work hard, we will achieve.” Multiple intelligences are nurtured through small group instruction coupled with individualized learning. Succession plans closely monitor the needs of all students using a timely, measurable and actionable data driven approach. This was observed after a mini lesson when students were able to choose whether or not they should stay with

the teacher for additional support, or choose another activity from a variety of others offered to them. Each activity is embedded with supportive scaffolds and extensions so that even a struggling learner can advance their thinking. Based on these practices the second grade inquiry team has disaggregated data that indicates targeted students in grade 2 have increased between 10% and 28% in decoding and identifying multi-syllabic words through the Foundations program. Additionally, out of 60 kindergarten students, 56 have made progress in operations and algebraic thinking from the initial CCSS assessment to the post assessment as of January 2013.

- Teaching practices in every classroom leverage strategies like collaborative learning, critical thinking and questioning that promote sophisticated levels of thinking. All students are able to reflect on what classmates are saying and use transitional phrases like, “I can add on to your thoughts” and “I would like to interject my thinking”. Furthermore, group discussions are autonomous where the teacher steps back and the students manage their own discussion. Strategic use of scaffolding techniques like modeling, creative use of graphic organizers, use of technology and attention to building specialized vocabulary provides purposeful multiple entry points to the lesson and tasks in order to increase the knowledge of all levels of learners. The school has celebrated the fact that kindergarten students have grown 1.4 levels from the initial assessment to the post assessment on informational writing, and a total of 93% of students have demonstrated gains in this area.
- School leaders make astute and strategic organizational and instructional decisions that lead to the attainment of the school’s short and long-term goals. (1.3)
 - Budgetary decisions and resources are effectively managed so that goals are focused on curriculum development that is closely aligned to the CCSS. The development of the School Effectiveness Team and Vertical Planning Team has aided support for CIE and directly connects to the increase in reading levels as reflected in the quarterly analysis of scholar achievement data across the school. Additionally, through the PENCIL Partnership Program (NYC Business to Schools Partnership) the school has teamed with JetBlue Airlines and has received a donation of 47 laptops which have been incorporated into a technology lab for scholars. Students agree that the laptops enable them to conduct RazKids reading assessments which help them identify “spicy” words, remember the meanings of the words and make their writing pieces more “memorable for the reader”.
 - Teacher teams meet on an average of 4 periods per week and can demonstrate a clear trajectory of work that includes the creation of mid-year baselines, goals and annual outcomes. This work is linked to improved pedagogical practices like the implementation of an inquiry tracker sheet and the transference of the skills from the Foundations program to standards based writing. Vertical teams were formed across grades and teachers engage

in intervisitation cycles based on teacher strengths and areas of support needed to enhance practice using student assessment data and feedback from observations. The work of the teams has led to strong collaborative planning where teachers are able to create rigorous tasks and feel supported by their colleagues to improve the effectiveness of their practices. As a result, student work products, which are being evaluated based on their current grade standards, as well as those standards one grade level above, show high levels of understanding and growth. Specifically, 90% of the students were able to meet or exceed grade level standards in art and science in all covered modules as evidenced by module assessments, projects and daily work.

- Teachers succinctly use a myriad of assessments aligned to curriculum that guide and inform instructional decisions in order to establish a clear understanding of the performance of students. (2.2)
 - Rubrics, created by teacher teams, assess students' mastery of the standards and the content relative to skill development. These documents are used across the grades to ensure consistency of expectations and higher order thinking in students' work products. Students complete a mastery rubric that indicate if they can move to the next level of exploration while teachers provide their own rubric and feedback that includes students' next learning steps. Additionally, student conferences support the feedback so that there is purposeful follow through that enables students to have a toolbox of supports in order to meet their goals. This practice has been very successful as evidenced in students' writing achievements showing 90% of kindergarten students able to spell simple words phonetically drawing on their knowledge of sound-letter relationships according to the outcomes of on-demand writing assessments. Furthermore, 90% of first graders are able to produce and expand complete sentences in shared language activities using frequently occurring nouns, verbs and adjectives.
 - All teachers are able to explain why students are in a particular group for each lesson, and support the rationale with the data that was diagnosed according to the standards aligned to their decisions. Students' understanding is monitored at all levels of a lesson to adjust instruction to meet needs. Teachers frequently and consistently make use of strategies like turn and talk, exit slips, conferencing and student autonomy to elicit information regarding individual student understanding and trends. Students naturally assess themselves and peers using their student mastery rubrics to monitor their own understanding and progress independently, or as a result of the teacher's directions. Students as young as five years old can confidently share their next learning steps in all content areas. As a result of these procedures a minimum of 74% of first graders have met their March benchmark for word choice and sentence fluency based on the Bank Street writing assessment.
- The school has established highly effective systems for strategically observing and monitoring teacher practice with a clear focus on improving pedagogy and student performance. (4.1)

- The school sets high standards for teaching that teachers strive to meet, devoting time well above their professional responsibilities to strengthen the craft of designing lessons that meet the individualized needs of each of their students. The quarterly, formal observation cycle supports teaching practice through the use of data to plan lessons and deliver instruction. Mid-year conversations are held with every staff member to review overall summative practice, student achievement data and individual professional development I goals. Teachers have an opportunity during these meetings to reflect on their practice in each competency using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. They also posit that questioning strategies have empowered students to ask strategic questions of themselves and peers, thus creating a high level of comprehension and interest in every lesson.

- Each classroom setting makes it abundantly clear that there is a common understanding of what effective teaching looks and sounds like as aligned to the school's goals and philosophy resonating that all students are on a "path to excellence". Furthermore, school leaders have normed feedback around that philosophy by aligning professional development goals to student data to ensure consistency of teacher development. Professional development logs for all staff are clearly aligned to Danielson competencies and list "glows" and "grows" of observations. Follow-up meetings with teachers after classroom observations to debrief findings and set next steps are part of the established protocol. Based on the data tracked through teacher reflection sheets and professional development action plans, all processes to strengthen pedagogy like deepening questioning strategies to reach all levels of learners have resulted in a demonstrated growth in teachers' practice and scholarly discourse that supports student achievement. Evidence shows that all students' proficiency skills in writing are on or above grade level showing independent skills in strategies like word sorting, blending and word families.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to reflect upon evaluating the quality of school level decisions and systems so that adjustments can be made to further increase coherence and student mastery of CCSS. (5.1)
 - Effective and transparent processes are in place to evaluate curricular and instructional practices, quality of school culture, and the use of organizational resources. The administration is flexible in making adjustments once findings are available. However, collaboration and decision making that includes all school constituents is slightly limited, making the process, and communication of adjustments to the school community an ongoing activity over time.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: A.C.E. Academy for Scholars at the Geraldine Ferraro Campus	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