

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Pioneer Academy

Elementary School Q307

**10-74 100th Street
Corona
NY 11368**

Principal: Cecilia Jackson

Dates of review: March 14- March 15, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Madelene Chan

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Pioneer Academy is an elementary school with 913 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 2% Black, 92% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% Pacific Islander/Hawaiian and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 37% English language learners and 14% 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 96.89%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's curriculum is purposefully aligned to key Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and reflects cognitively engaging tasks that foster independence in all learners. (1.1)
 - The administration and staff have been concentrating on the CCSS and the learning shifts for the past two years via inquiry work, team meetings, summer networking and professional development. These efforts have resulted in the alignment of the curriculum to the CCSS in reading, writing and math with a focus on specific key standards like close reading based on what the text is explicitly stating, determining central ideas from a text or theme, being precise and having sustainability when solving a math problem, and modeling with math and explaining answers using details and maps. Observable work around instructional planning and task design includes the use of the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) rubric and Understanding by Design (UbD) principles to assess rigor and provide purposeful learning experiences for students. Teams are preparing tasks based on what is needed for students to know in the next grade creating a platform for college and career readiness. These practices have resulted in rigorous tasks and a better alignment of curricula to the standards.
 - All units and lesson plans are developed using the UbD framework which has aided students in developing a deep understanding of the content being taught through the emphasis of scaffolded instruction and strongly articulated teaching points. The use of backward planning by teachers and collective decisions on assessments have helped to improve planning resulting in acquisition, meaning and transfer (AMT) of learning. Students, who are referred to as scholars, consistently reflect on the "40 year plan" during class discussions and how what they are learning now can be useful to them later in life. Effective language scaffolds for English language learners (ELLs) and targeted supports like a varied use of technology and individual iPad accessibility for students with disabilities (SWDs), as well as extensions for students who have attained mastery are also included in teachers' plans and conference notes. Cognitive engagement resonates in the scores of students receiving assistance in reading, showing more than 50% improvement on the Comprehensive Assessment Reading Strategies pre- and post-tests, as well as 70% of ELLs in grades 1-5 advancing three or more reading levels since October.
- Across classrooms, thoughtful, well-planned lessons reflect opportunities for student collaboration promoting student engagement and autonomy in learning. (1.2)
 - There is a universal understanding throughout the school that in order for learning to be purposeful and productive lessons need to directly link to students' lives, provide choices within the learning, as well as embed opportunities for students to develop their own questions throughout a lesson. In a fifth grade class, students were working in groups to persuade their class audience to purchase a product they created as a team. The audience had an opportunity to debate the usefulness of the

product creating an atmosphere of scholarly discourse and student autonomy. As a result of the opportunities provided to think and learn independently, students posit that they are able to relate what they learn in school to their daily lives as well as apply learning to broader contexts.

- In all classrooms evidence of differentiated tasks, strategic grouping, effective modeling strategies and meaningful classroom routines is consistent to provide multiple entry points into the lesson. Teachers design and deliver thematic units that integrate math, science and social studies developing students' vocabulary by bridging learning to different contexts. One student stated that he likes when his teacher shows him how to think "out of the box" so that he can be ready for harder work in years to come. Results of these practices have indicated that students are engaged in learning, have become more determined to think beyond the main task as well as enjoy challenging one another with questions that they have created.
- The administration's passion and vision is the pulse behind thoughtful decisions around school management promoting the use of time and resources to meet instructional goals. (1.3)
 - The administration's vision to "Strive toward Excellence" is well known throughout the school community and influences the school's use of resources. An AUSSIE partnership has helped to design an interactive website that has streamlined information for the school community in an effort to build effective communication and improve upon the home school connection. Parents and teachers alike believe the website is a "touchstone" into the hard work the school is doing to raise achievement. All students in grades 1-5 receive chess instruction and the school's chess team, in its third year of affiliation, has placed in local and national tournaments. The school celebrates that 67% of the players are above grade level in reading and math since joining the chess team. Professional development sessions with consultants from Cking Education has helped teachers create lessons that show students how to reason abstractly and quantitatively, construct viable arguments, critique the reasoning of others and use appropriate tools strategically. Results of this support and learning have indicated that students in grades K-2 are better able to express their mathematical findings using words, pictures and timelines.
 - School scheduling has been analyzed to meet the varying learning needs of students. Currently, each grade has four common preparatory periods and an additional period so that teachers are able to meet weekly, as a result of an eight period day. Each month, teachers have approximately 320 minutes to collaborate, plan, analyze scholar work and assessments, modify curriculum, as well as engage in professional contributions. Students' needs and levels are driving the development of tasks that have led to improvements in their levels of confidence to attempt challenging problems. Upper grade students agree that they are now willing to take risks and verbally answer more questions assigned during independent and group work. In addition, a departmentalized approach is taking place on the fourth grade is building on areas of teacher expertise. Results from this practice indicate that the entire fourth grade is showing improvement in reading levels, some as high as four levels since October. Furthermore, all out of classroom personnel support classes daily to provide small group instruction on identified skills and strategies

through Response to Intervention (RTI), which provides tiered, research based intervention. This has narrowed the academic gaps for students in tiers two and three. Consequently, RTI results reflect success for 60% of first graders who have shown improvements in math skills depicting concrete, abstract and representational thinking.

- The school's effective teacher development process includes meaningful feedback from administrators resulting in improved instructional practice. (4.1)
 - The administration is very involved in the development of teacher practice providing weekly data-driven feedback through the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, a research-based rubric. Formal and informal observations target specific instructional needs like student engagement and encouraging student self-reflection and is aligned to a development plan that articulates recommendations directly linked to the effectiveness of improved instructional practices. This has been seen in students' work in the areas of increasing their sight word recognition and fluency and comprehension by thinking within, beyond and about the text from different points of view.
 - "High Expectations, High Support" is one of the mantras at Pioneer Academy. Professional development is provided school-wide, team-wide and on an individual basis. The Danielson Framework is used to provide ongoing systematic support as well as individualized, prescriptive plan according to instruction need and intended growth. A comprehensive professional development program is designed so that professional development opportunities are integrated and aligned across the different grade levels. Network consultants provide teacher support in the areas of planning stronger, more effective units by incorporating a hybrid model of UbD principles and the research based model of Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). Teachers agree that these practices have helped them ask deeper questions and transfer information to other subjects for a thematic approach to learning. Clear expectations are articulated via the instructional team and discussed at team meetings to reinforce strengths, challenges and next steps towards coherent planning. As a result, 53% of third grade students including ELLs and SWDs are at or above grade level in reading as reflected on classroom running records and conference notes.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen the alignment of assessments with curricula in order to gather feedback and adjust instructional practices to improve student outcomes. (2.2)
 - The assessment tool, AIMSWeb in conjunction with Acuity and pre- and post- baseline assessments, are used to monitor student progress through a web-based data tracking system in order to plan for individualized instruction. Teachers are diligent about collecting student data, although the level of analysis and interpretation needed in order to provide students with actionable feedback and clear next steps is limited and inconsistent across grades. In addition some students have trouble articulating what steps they need to take to progress because a number of rubrics are too advanced for them to be able to relate the criteria to their needs. As a result, student reflection and achievement is not

transparently linked to teacher feedback, limiting teacher and student understanding of progress toward goals.

- The school engages in a variety of formal and informal assessments throughout the school year. Pre- and post-tests are used to establish a baseline for learning especially through running records and individual student/ teacher conferences. Although these practices are in place, there are inconsistent strategies available for students to discuss their work and plan for expedient improvements. For example when students were asked to reference their current levels in math and reading in connection with assessment results many were unsure of the linkage. Furthermore, even though student friendly rubrics are available, younger grade students have difficulty expressing ways in which their work is evaluated. As a result, modifications to instruction are fragmented and lack specific rationale in order to meet the learning needs of all students.
- Further develop school-wide systems for evaluating curricular and programmatic decisions in order to monitor and adjust their effectiveness and ensure school wide coherence. (5.1)
 - Grade level goals and monthly progress reports are two practices that are in place to monitor and determine students' progress. Observations conducted by administration and lead teachers provide support to teachers on how to implement the curricular and instructional shifts that need to occur in the classroom. However, the school is still refining their systems to aggregate data in a way that clearly identifies effectiveness of school wide instructional and organizational decisions, as well as the efforts of support staff and their accomplishments with groups of students. Consequently, the school's ability to identify which decisions and personnel are meeting short term goals in order to achieve long term expectations is limited at this time.
 - Parents are very proud of all of the opportunities afforded to their children. They are happy to report that the morning physical education program coupled with Cook Shop, a program that teaches parents and children to make healthy food choices, has motivated students to come to school and some have even lost weight. Although there is much enthusiasm around these programs the school is in the process of determining a timeline for measuring their success and the way the results will be communicated. As a result, it is currently difficult to connect the success of each program to the CCSS and student learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Pioneer Academy 24Q307	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