

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

William A. Morris

Middle R061

**445 Castleton Avenue
Staten Island
NY 10301**

Principal: Susan Tronolone

Dates of review: February 26-27, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Mary Barton

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

I.S. 61 is a middle school with 1,202 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 35% Black, 40% Hispanic, 21% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 91.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and school leaders make informed and effective organizational decisions across all aspects of the school to support improvements in student learning. (1.3)
 - After spending the first year as principal studying existing organizational structures, reviewing data and meeting with various constituencies, the principal made major changes in the way the school is organized this school year. Teachers who were teaching out of their license area were reassigned to teach in their license area or licensed teachers were hired so that students would receive the benefit of teachers having the necessary content knowledge. These teachers receive support from literacy and math coaches as well as supervisors in this transition. Strong Integrated Co-Teaching classroom teams serve as models for new teams through intervisitation and newer teachers and/or returning teachers to the classroom have been paired with strong partner teachers to serve as support for their practices. Grade level cohorts are organized with teachers in specific subject areas teaching students in common and grades are each housed on separate floors. Due to scheduling of common planning and lunch periods, students receive more focused attention by a group of teachers, who meet minimally twice a week as teams to discuss interventions for instruction as well as around supports for social and emotional issues which has reduced student incident and suspension rates for the first six months of school by 52% compared to the same period last school year. Students also remain for most of the day in one area of the school building. As a result of instructional supports, student achievement in math through the use of Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) aligned units of study has increased by 85% in two eighth grade classes for students with disabilities. In addition, eighth grade English language learners (ELL's) have made gains in their Lexile levels by one benchmark, as measured by the Read 180 literacy program.
- Teachers work collaboratively in teacher teams, participate in collegial conversations and identify practices that support student progress. (4.2)
 - All teachers are a part of a teacher team and, as such, are an integral part of the school's culture. Department teams focus on developing Common Core aligned units of study, look at student work stemming from the units of study and make adjustments to curricula and assessments. These teams also ensure that instruction is coherent across the grade so that all students are exposed to CCLS-aligned instruction. Grade level teams meet weekly across the school and use a consistent protocol to direct the conversation around instruction and intervention strategies to support student learning. The teams also engage in inquiry inventory, which is a sharing of practices in classrooms, supports for particular students in specific academic areas and discussion around scheduling of special projects and assessments and the resulting student work led by the team leader. Cohort teachers consistently utilize a *"Looking at Student Work protocol"*, to discuss instruction occurring in their various

disciplines, academic interventions that students need and students' social and emotional needs, developing plans of intervention for the students focused on. For example, teachers of eighth grade math met to discuss a CCLS aligned unit they had developed and utilized last school year and made adjustments to formative and summative assessments based on the student work that resulted, along with using data from their current students to guide their thinking. They also discussed the updated real world examples to reflect items popular with current students. Through this structure, students are well known by their teachers and teachers use this information in making instructional decisions to meet student needs. This has resulted in academic gains for all learners, as demonstrated through increased unit assessment results in math and English Language Arts.

- Twelve teacher team leaders are in place across all grade levels and for groups of students. The principal stated that these leaders are considered to be the “heart of the school.” They meet with the principal on a regular basis who seeks suggestions from them regarding key decision making in the school around the use of resources to implement the CCLS, as well as in ways to meet students at their entry points. These leaders also work closely with the assistant principal, guidance counselor and dean for their grade as they focus on students' academic and social - emotional needs. Moreover, they often serve as unofficial mentors to newer teachers and are also known to parents who call upon them for assistance with a myriad of requests. As a result of this structure, teachers have opportunities to practice effective leadership as teacher team leaders and mentors and to be a part of key decision making in the school.
- The comprehensive school curriculum offers a wide range of opportunities for students to explore standards-based learning experiences that support academic progress. (1.1)
 - In order to promote the close reading of text and grounding reading and writing across content areas with evidence from text, the school has adapted the “Patterned Way of Reading, Writing, and Talking” strategy across the core subject areas. This philosophy is used by teachers in the planning of their lessons and stems from feedback from the Danielson competency around *Designing Coherent Instruction*. The school has prioritized writing, therefore school wide all students write informational and argumentative essays stemming from CCLS-aligned units developed and/or adapted by teachers, some who serve as Common Core Fellows, as well as grounding discussion from text. In math, they have adapted the *Patterned Way* to meet the particulars of math instruction so that, school wide, teachers stress that students develop fluency and that problem solving has a real world application, as seen in classroom visits. Scaffolds are included for students with disabilities (SWD's) and ELL's around the use of a variety of text levels to meet them at their entry points. Across classrooms and disciplines, the school has emphasized the importance of focusing on speaking and listening standards with a focus on higher order questioning and discussion around the use of text evidence infused into lessons. As a result, the instructional shifts are reflected in curricula, and there is a continuity of rigorous curricula across the school in all areas to support all students in achieving college and career readiness skills.

- Teachers utilize a variety of assessments and common measures that are aligned to curricula to guide instructional decisions to inform planning, in order to establish a clear understanding of the performance of students. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams develop common rubrics used in the units of study taught across content areas. For example, science and social studies teachers worked with the school's literacy coach in developing assessments for CCLS aligned social studies and science, summative argumentative writing pieces and common rubrics aligned to these tasks. Teachers have developed pre and post assessments as well as formative assessments for each CCLS unit of study taught in math to track students' academic growth. In addition, an analysis of student performance is done by teacher teams at the end of the unit and data is used to inform unit revisions as well as the plans for the next unit of study. For example, there was an analysis of quarterly exams at the end of the fall quarter, consequently, all sixth grade students now work on a common word problem across the grade weekly, with teachers providing modeling around breaking down the important components of the problem so that students have more success with a CCLS aligned assessment. As a result of administering and studying the results from these assessments at the teacher team level, action plans are developed for individual and groups of students and this information is shared across departments and grade levels to support students towards mastery of their goals.
 - Teachers check for students' understanding in a variety of ways across content areas. They frequently use exit slips to assess daily lessons as viewed in classroom visits and students are grouped accordingly. In addition, the school utilizes various assessments across all grade levels such as, a sixth grade Degrees of Reading power assessment, Acuity, Voyager and Read 180 as well as quarterly and midterm examinations throughout the school in literacy and math. With the support of the literacy coach and the structures in place for departments to work on units of study, 100% of teachers in these areas implemented the teaching of CCLS units and use of assessments and rubrics in these areas. In addition, students have the opportunity to self assess using common rubrics and checklists developed by teachers that are aligned to learning outcomes. Teachers add "next steps" to students work consistently across the school. Students spoke to next steps they need to take with assignments which they said help them to produce better work. As a result, students have been exposed to CCLS assessments across content areas and have ownership of their work.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that instruction meets the entry points of all students in all subject areas so that students are consistently afforded the supports they need to meet and exceed the standards. (1.2)
 - While visiting many classrooms, students were strategically grouped based on their need, working on varied activities and having discussions using text evidence with one another, based on exit slips from the prior lesson or from a recent unit assessment. This practice, however, was not

seen across all the classrooms that were visited. In some instances, students were working on the same assignment as a whole class without direct, targeted instruction or the teacher dominated the lesson by posing all of the questions and leading the direction of the discussion in the lesson. As a result, some students are not being met at their entry points or having their thinking pushed by either the teacher or classmates, limiting opportunities for higher level thinking and participation as observed in some classrooms.

- Extend the effective practices of communicating with families and deepen the work of messaging academic expectations around the CCLS so that all students and families know how to reach higher levels of achievement. (3.4)
 - The principal is acutely aware of the disappointing results of the School Survey from 2011-12 and, based on those results as well as conversations with school constituent groups, made changes or added programs this school year to further encourage parents to partner with the school. These additional resources include the creation of a new school website and the development of a student and parent handbook outlining the school's grading policy and expectations for learning. The *School Messenger* is programmed so that parents of students in particular grades receive monthly calls with information about what students are learning in school across core subjects and expectations. Progress Reports between the report cards are now issued to all students, not just those who are at risk for failing a particular class. The school has also adopted Engrade, a web-based grading program. However, not all teachers actively utilize the program. While parents are appreciative of the efforts made by the school to keep them informed, some parents stated that they receive no updates through Engrade. In addition, parents report wanting to be informed through multiple media of student expectations and progress as well as to receive additional information about the CCLS. As a result of these missing elements, not all families have access to student attendance information, homework and grading in real time, so that they may support their children to be fully informed and work toward improved academic achievement.
 - Several initiatives have been instituted this school year in order to establish a culture for learning. Students are fully aware of the expectations of their teachers around their writing and math through rubrics in advance of their CCLS-aligned assessments. They receive actionable feedback around their work and can articulate their next steps. In addition to more attentive student cohorts that were established, the school has focused on establishing additional systems to reward positive behaviors through piloting the Zone PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports) program and a classroom buck reward store. Students are recognized at quarterly assembly programs to celebrate academic success. Rubrics have been developed for students to internalize the behavioral expectations for success in school. However, in speaking with students, some state that they did not know about all aspects of the programs established by the school to reward success. As a result, all students, including those in high-need subgroups, may not have the information needed to set appropriate goals for success in school.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: William A. Morris / R061	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