

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**The Melrose School
Elementary-Middle X029
758 Courtlandt Avenue
Bronx
NY 10451**

Principal: Meredith Gotlin

Dates of review: March 6-7, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Yolanda Torres

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Melrose School is an elementary-middle school with 737 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 33% Black, 64% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 21% 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 90.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Organizational decisions and strategic use of resources support school goals, thereby meeting the needs of all students, inclusive of English language learners and students with disabilities. (1.3)
 - School leaders have shifted teacher assignments to ensure that teacher expertise is totally aligned to grade level, content specific and school-wide instructional goals. The hiring of new teachers has brought new energy and innovative ideas, leading to a learning culture in which staff members collaborate and respect each other's contributions to students' academic progress. Strategic departmentalization of upper elementary grades has led to vertical instructional conversations and planning amongst teachers. The school's partnerships with organizations such as the Lincoln Center, which provides free music sessions for students, New York Cares, which spearheads collaborative beautification of the school, Green Thumb, which creates a school community garden, and the Classic Center, which enhances students' academic and social emotional well-being with clubs, college talks and trips, contribute to a seamless process, where teachers volunteer to work with the personnel after school, resulting in a cohesive support structure for student achievement and emotional growth. Incorporation of technology as a learning tool is a highlight in each classroom, resulting in improved engagement of all learners. Educating the whole child is at the core of decisions made, leading to meaningful student work products which demonstrate students' consistent involvement in high level performance tasks. As a result, all students are cognitively engaged at their different entry points, with scaffolded practices that support their diverse learning needs.
 - The school offers six to eight week cycles of targeted small group instruction to provide all students with tiered interventions that meet their needs. Teachers meet regularly to ascertain the impact of the differentiated interventions in place and make needed adjustments in student flexible groupings. Students' progress is accurately analyzed and measured in comparison with group and school-wide goals, leading to instructional improvement and comprehensive access to curricula by all students, especially English language learners and students with disabilities. There is strategic hiring and placement of teachers to ensure that their areas of expertise match grade-specific expectations in order to address the gaps affecting student achievement. Teachers collaborate to discuss evidence that supports their decisions on interventions and group structures, resulting in outstanding school-wide commitment to ongoing improvement in student achievement and related organizational goals.
- School leaders use a research-based teaching framework to provide teachers with actionable feedback, leading to improved and differentiated teaching practices that result in high levels of teacher effectiveness. (4.1)

- All teachers, especially new teachers, are well supported by school leaders, mentors, collaborative planning and discussions, and coaching for professional improvement. Strategic goal-setting sessions are focused on teacher-specific lesson planning to ensure instructional coherence. Based on frequent observations, school leaders provide feedback on classroom environments, bulletin boards and lesson planning, leading to the completion of an Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) for each teacher, with a rationale for the objective(s), specific time frame for improvement, and next steps. This rigorous process is grounded in analyses of student work and data to ensure that the evaluated outcomes become embedded teaching strategies that lead to effective instructional practice. School leaders focus on concrete and actionable feedback by continuously calibrating their observation process, resulting in coherent and seamless communication of clear expectations for improving teacher pedagogy. Thus there is continuous use of effective feedback to support improvement in teaching and learning, leading to mutual accountability for teacher development and commitment to instructional growth.
- Early in the school year, school leaders ‘calendarize’ observations based on needs observed during their walkthroughs, data talks with teachers, completion of the IPDPs, and formative observations correlated with the school-wide professional development plan that effectively addresses teachers’ needs. The belief that “one size does not fit all”, is evident in the tiered professional development provided and the feedback shared in the IPDPs and informal visitations, leading to immediate implementation, with ongoing monitoring by school leaders. School leaders regularly discuss formal and informal observations in order to make purposeful decisions on teacher tenure, assignments, retention and identification of leadership skills, with the result that leadership promotions have come from within. Thus, based on data from frequent visitations and formative observations, school leaders have built staff leadership capacity, as evidenced by the selection of one teacher as a coach to provide other teachers with the support they need to improve student performance.
- Strategic and well-coordinated use and analysis of ongoing assessments and grading practices lead to effective instructional adjustments that maximize student learning. (2.2)
 - Cross-grade and vertical meetings afford teachers opportunities to collaboratively create assessments and rubrics that serve as accurate barometers of student progress across disciplines. Teacher-created benchmark assessments in English language arts and math are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and provide content-specific measurement of student achievement of strategies and concepts, resulting in ongoing adjustments in instructional practices and feedback that promotes student awareness of next steps to improve their learning. Other assessments such as Fountas & Pinnell, Teachers College Reading and Writing Continuum and school-designed pre and end of unit assessments across content areas, provide teachers with additional data to inform adjustments to meet students’ needs. As teachers look at these results, they continue to hold data talks in order to identify instructional trends which inform action plans, resulting in the creation of small groups that address the needs of all students. Grading practices and school-designed progress reports aligned with the key standards and curricula,

lead to clear conversations on student work, participation, and behavior. Teacher conference notes serve as ongoing checks for understanding,

with all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, receiving targeted and actionable feedback that results in self-reflection, self-regulation and improved mastery of learning goals.

- Teacher teams engage in frequent inquiry-embedded meetings that improve their practice and ensure that they have a voice in key decisions that positively impact student learning. (4.2)
 - All teachers meet regularly before, during and after school to analyze student work and assessment results, in order to identify the achievement gaps that adversely impact student learning. As teachers plan collaboratively, develop strategic goals and make decisions on collegial classroom inter-visitations, they devise next steps to provide reciprocal feedback. There are deep conversations on effective practices that may be replicated for consistent instructional improvement, leading to a seamless learning process that builds student mastery of goals from grade to grade and content to content. Lead teachers work with their colleagues to ensure that their support is in tandem with the expected outcomes from the constructivist approach the school has adopted. Their aim is to provide instruction with a differentiated approach that meets all students at multiple points of entry and strengthens their ability to use critical thinking skills and connect to real-world contextual content. As they look at student work, they plan and implement constructivist lessons that are focused on engaging students in accountable talk that leads them to support a stance, with evidence from texts. During data talks, teachers examine student work and use the data to analyze students' learning process and identify gaps to be addressed immediately. They make decisions that positively impact student learning, as evidenced by a teacher led book club and a test prep academy that have contributed to improved student achievement on benchmark assessments.
- The school culture is a safe and nurturing environment, where all stakeholders work relentlessly to insure communal commitment to the academic and social emotional well-being of each child and adult. (1.4)
 - The school's belief in the importance of strong support for students' social and emotional development, is evidenced by the Second Step character building program for elementary grades and advisory sessions for middle level students. The evolvment of a collaborative learning community focused on the creation of a safe environment for students, staff, and families is evident, thanks to feedback from surveys of staff and students, professional book clubs, special activities and perseverance strategies. School leaders are committed to ensuring that they get a pulse of the school from all constituents and convey a strong message of community by meeting informally with staff, students, and families to share information about school activities and evaluate progress in achieving individual and school goals. Thus, the voices of all stakeholders have been taken into consideration, resulting in a communal buy-in and a great deal of respect towards the leadership. Consequently, parents state that they feel welcome; students affirm that the school values their voices, and

staff members indicate that they feel well-regarded as a strong part of a school community that is transparent and professional.

- The school partners with a variety of community-based organizations that provide social emotional outlets for students, thus exposing them to field trips and overnight camp experiences that result in improved student behaviors, increased attendance rates, and positive academic outcomes. For example, a program called GLOW, which stands for “shine as a student”, is a social emotional outlet that contributes to positive outcomes in student behaviors by improving students’ self-esteem. At times, teachers co-teach with personnel free of charge, to provide students with learning opportunities centered on their social emotional development. This translates into improved academic performance in classrooms, due to the collaboration between teachers and community partners. A Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) allows students to provide feedback on school activities and offer ideas to sustain improvement in student behavior and attendance. The teacher awards committee keeps a pulse on students’ positive academic and social behaviors in order to reward students with certificates, awards, trophies and outings. Teachers have also organized and facilitated professional development sessions for all staff and implemented activities such as a community garden, afterschool classroom quick clean activities and student-led mediation sessions to ensure that parents and students are part of the school’s inclusive and cohesive culture. The school’s commitment to parental involvement is equally evident in events such as Family Movie Nights, Family Fridays, Family Day, Carnival and a Class Parent Program, that was created to ensure that each class is represented by parents who attend a monthly breakfast with the principal. During this monthly affair, parents share ideas on topics to support their children’s learning and follow up with outreach to other parents from their child’s class. As a result, the school is exemplary in maintaining a collaborative environment in which children and adults consistently demonstrate growth in their academic and personal behaviors.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen the alignment of curricula to teaching practices to ensure that all students continue to engage in higher levels of thinking and participation, as they complete academic tasks across content areas. (1.2)
 - Teachers plan and understand that students need to construct their own meaning. This is evidenced by classes that are student-centered and tasks are rigorous and challenge students to engage in critical thinking. For example, in completing math tasks, students have demonstrated, via work and conversations, that the newly adopted math program is difficult, due to the range of skills and knowledge that they have to show as they conceptualize and solve the problems. Teachers provide students with graphic organizers, implement collaborative grouping, engage in ‘push-in’ support services and utilize effective questioning techniques across content areas, to address students’ needs, leading to student progress. The use of technology as an instructional tool is evident in every classroom, thereby enhancing student learning and providing each student with the opportunity to manipulate this tool for his/her academic advancement. However, there is inconsistent evidence that all students

conceptualize academic tasks in a manner that reflects high levels of intellectual independence.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: The Melrose 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