

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

The Great Expectations School

Elementary School X085

**2400 Marion Ave
Bronx, New York 10458**

Principal: Ted Husted

Dates of review: December 4 – 5, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Melodie Mashel

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

P.S. 85 is an elementary school with 1,087 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 28% Black, 69% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 26% English language learners and 16% 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 92.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is Proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School data driven goal setting and effective action planning results in improved teacher practices and overall school improvement. (3.1)
 - School leaders' fully aligned short list of goals to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and Citywide Expectations (CIE) provide a clear and targeted plan for the school's overall improvement. Building from recommendations from NYS Joint Intervention Team recommendations (JIT), the principal and key staff members worked strategically and astutely on identifying key areas of focus for the school's critical improvement plan. Improving teacher practice, student engagement, curriculum development and engaging parents in the lifeline of the school are the specific goals and major tenets of the work of the school. Data culled from a variety of sources such as: the School's Learning Environment Survey, the JIT, NYCDOE Progress Report, Teacher Effectiveness Program (TEP), NYS assessments, Developmental Reading Assessment, (DRA), the Independent Reading Level Assessment Framework (IRLA) and close examination of student work inform the professional development plan for the school. An outside consultant supports the school with its focus of improving teacher practice that fosters student engagement. Hence, school wide implementation of Kagan structures, teaching techniques and strategies designed to promote student collaborative learning in strategically designed heterogeneous small groups of students, has resulted in high levels of student engagement. Visits to classrooms reveal students steeped in discussions about their work. In one classroom a student stated they liked talking to other students about the work because they "get to hear different thinking and hear from students they don't always get to sit next to." These structures improve teacher practice; immerse all students, including English language learners and special education students in engaging, high level, content rich conversations that support closing the achievement gap. Reviews of student work samples support the school's full implementation of CCLS thematic units of study that has fostered coherence of teaching content and consistency of teacher practice. Visits to classrooms reveal students immersed in their second quarter unit titled Determination and a review of student work folders indicates students are producing grade standard work on their performance assessment tasks. As a result of the school's clarity and targeted action plan, teacher practice that engages students in higher order thinking experiences has improved and school leaders and staff work together to accelerate the levels of student performance.
 - School leaders effectively communicate a clear trajectory for the school's overall improvement to all constituents. While the school moved from a C to a B on the NYCDOE Progress Report, school leaders, staff and parents are clear about the school's need to be removed from its current "priority" status. Clear and specific goals to accomplish this are articulated to staff through a variety of venues including summer planning, professional development opportunities and during teacher planning sessions. Attendance data indicates *The People's Circle*, a parent forum

for parent input and emotional and academic support for the school's families has been well received by the community. In addition, in order to assist families on how they can support student learning at home and develop a full partnership in the educational process, the school has developed a partnership with Mercy College Parent Center, a program committed to providing parent workshops on how to prepare students for a college or career path. As a result, there is a shared sense of responsibility and accountability throughout the school community that supports the school's improvement plan.

- School leaders and faculty have aligned the school's curriculum to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), embedding key standards in their units of study and resulting in all students engaged in rigorous learning experiences. (1.1)
 - School leaders and faculty have aligned their units of study to the CCLS and have tailored the units to include instructional shifts across all grades. Data informed decisions from a variety of sources such as; DRA, IRLA, NYS Tests, analysis of student performance assessment tasks and recommendations made from NYSED/NYCDOE Joint Intervention Team (JIT), led school leaders to identify key standards for each grade that needed to be addressed in the units and to lengthen the time students spent immersed in a unit. For example; one of the key standards for grade one for the first quarter unit was "demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print." Diagnostic assessments at the beginning of each unit inform teachers about what the students "know" and "understand" about the unit and teachers customize a plan for each unit. The depth and breadth of the thematic units of study promote student readiness for college and career, as they focus on the communication skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing within each unit. As a result, the vast majority of students are engaged in learning experiences that promote higher order thinking.
 - In partnership with an outside consultant, the school has embraced school wide implementation of Kagan cooperative learning structures as a vehicle through which students engage in discussions about their work and make their thinking visible. This requires that students collaboratively review and discuss their work so that the level of thinking for all students including English language learners and special education students is enhanced. For example, across grades, student discourse structures such as "face to face" or "shoulder to shoulder" facilitate teacher's student groupings and provides multiple entry points for all students. These structures are supported by the use of a variety of thinking maps which students use in organizing their thinking and work, thus ensuring rich discussions that engage students in rigorous learning experiences.
- Across classrooms assessment practices are well aligned to the curriculum and provide feedback to teachers that result in effective adjustments to curriculum and instruction. (2.2)
 - Across grades teachers use rubrics to set expectations for student performance and provide actionable feedback to students to guide their own work. Teachers state, these are used to ensure "students know what to do to move forward." A variety of assessments are used by teachers to

track student progress. The DRA is administered three times a year to assess student progress. The IRLA is used on an ongoing basis and complements the data obtained from the DRA. Network designed assessments are used to assess student progress in math and student work is reviewed on an ongoing basis. The analysis of these multiple data points provides teachers with a clear picture of student strengths and needs. For example, a review of student 5th grade writing samples revealed struggling students had difficulty understanding the question in the task. Therefore, an adjustment to teacher practice was made. Teachers decided to model a breakdown of the question to support the students. As a result of these practices, teachers refine their curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of all students and students have clear understanding of their next steps and what is needed to meet grade level benchmarks.

- A range of data is used by the school to analyze and gather information about student learning such as conference notes, rubrics, data tracking sheets, and student work that provide a clear picture of student strengths and needs. This information drives adjustments to curricula and instructional practices. Teacher teams meet on a weekly basis to examine student work. Consequently, teacher's group students around student similar needs, customize units of study, and consider a variety of teaching strategies to support student learning. As a result, the majority of students are engaged in high level tasks and are provided supports to ensure student achievement and learning.
- The school's leadership makes purposeful organizational decisions around teacher assignments, student programs and partnerships that improve instruction and result in meaningful student work. (1.3)
 - Recognizing the urgency for the school's overall improvement, the principal and the cabinet have made key organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and ensure student engagement and learning. The school's immersion in Kagan learning structures has resulted in elevating student engagement in discussions and promoting critical thinking experiences for all students. Student receptiveness to this model has ensured students converse about their work and use what they have learned from each other in their writing and assessment tasks. For example, students in one class were talking about the character Annie Oakley and students provided examples of her determination. At the conclusion of the high level discussion, students were able to use elements of the conversation in their writing pieces. As a result, student engagement is elevated and student work products show marked levels of improvement. Assistant principals have been assigned as support for specific areas such as literacy, instruction for English language learners and safety. An early morning period has been strictly devoted to student independent reading. Intervention services for students are provided by a licensed reading specialist and three additional teachers were hired on a part time basis to provide additional classroom support, effectively reducing the student to teacher ratio. A partnership with Mercy College Parent Center has helped to ensure parents remain connected to the school and discover how they can best support their children. The leadership's organizational decisions has resulted in improved instruction and meaningful student work products.

- School leaders have structured weekly teacher team meetings to examine student work and make adjustments to curricula and teacher instructional practices. Rubrics are tailored and academic tasks are refined to meet the needs of the students. Teachers reflect on their teaching practices and reflect on additional teaching strategies that support student learning. As a result, student post performance assessment task data reveal an increase in student performance and indicates that students have moved up at least one level. The principal attends the majority of these meetings and coaches support content area work. The ongoing collaboration has resulted in coherent practices across teachers and strengthening the school's ability to continue to improve student performance.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve teacher questioning so that student work products demonstrate evidence of higher order thinking for all learners including English language learners and special education students. (1.2)
 - The school has embraced structures that promote student discussions. Teachers are reflective about their practice and are clear on identifying what works and doesn't work with their students. However, teacher questioning techniques do not support the specific needs of all students. Teachers are not yet adept at designing tiered questions to provide multiple entry points for all learners, specifically English language learners and special education students. In a class of English language learners all students were working on the same task. The teacher did not scaffold the student task by using questions that provide multiple entry points for the various levels of English language learners in the classroom. This practice limits students' ability to extend their thinking and restricts their opportunity to demonstrate their learning in the work products produced. While teachers used guiding questions to scaffold student discussions, there is inconsistency in teachers grounding their instruction to require essential questions, thus preventing all students from consistently demonstrating extensions to their thinking in the work they produce.
 - Opportunities for special education students to engage in academically challenging tasks were not evident across all grades. For example, in one self contained special education class, students were reading material that was below their instructional level, thus limiting their exposure to complex text. In addition, few supports or scaffolds were evident that might help them to "negotiate" difficult text. While the Kagan structure supported the immersion of English language learner and students with disabilities in conversations around their work in classrooms, work products did not demonstrate the application of their thinking to the work generated. In another classroom all students were working on solving the same math problem on an activity sheet. The mathematical practices needed for students to engage in critical thinking, reasoning and real life problem solving were not evident. As a result, some students are prevented from producing work products that reflect high levels of thinking.

- Continue to build systems and structures to support student social and emotional needs to further the development of personal and academic student behaviors. (1.4)
 - Students expressed that there were insufficient venues through which to voice their concerns and opinions. Several students revealed that “only fifth grade gets to be in student government.” Students felt multiple grades should be permitted to participate in student government. The systems and structures currently in place do not encourage student input and honor their voice so that diverse cross section of students are able to further develop their social-emotional behaviors.
 - School wide implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS) is in place. However, clear articulation to students, teachers and families around the specific academic behaviors that are necessary to prepare students for college and career are not yet fully evident. While some students revealed that they needed to “study hard, work hard” and “use determination” to succeed in school, not all students were able to identify the behavioral and social skills they needed to practice to be successful 21st century learners. While they stated they could speak to their teachers about their concerns, other advisement structures to support students and support learning needs are not always accessible to students. As a result, students do not yet fully understand all of the behaviors needed to succeed in school, thus limiting students’ social and emotional development.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name:	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