

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Seton Falls Elementary School

11x111

3740 Baychester Avenue

Bronx

NY 10466

Principal: Ava Fullenweider

Dates of review: February 27-28, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Elizabeth A. White

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Seton Falls is an elementary school with 687 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 63% Black, 34% Hispanic, 0% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 20% 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 91.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Core content area curricula integrate literacy instruction to effectively incorporate the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) resulting in tasks that promote deep thinking and cross-curricular connections. (1.1)
 - The school has adopted the Citywide CCLS bundles and Core Content curricula as instructional guides and has strategically focused on embedding CCLS through writing. This focus is emphasized through units of nonfiction study that integrates all content areas. For example, in a kindergarten unit of study students explored living things. A culminating assignment was the *Penguin Project*. The task involved diagramming penguin physiology and the use of a semantic web to identify penguin characteristics which resulted in a final written summary composition. Each piece was scored based on a CCLS rubric for writing. This scaffolded task supported the successful engagement of a diversity of learners which enabled them to effectively convey information that was learned.
 - Similarly since curriculum across the school encourages students to demonstrate their thinking through habits of writing, the school's efforts have led to work products that encourage ownership by requiring explanation of thinking. For example, in fifth grade the *Explain Fractions* task required students to write a letter to a younger grade and to explain their step-by-step mathematics thinking process in the use of fractions. This has resulted in positive improvement in the way all students demonstrate their conceptual understanding of subject matter. In addition, this has ensured that tasks are appropriately rigorous and result in curricular strategies that support writing across all curricula that are aligned to the Common Core expectations.
- The school's strategic organizational decisions have resulted in increased support of the school's instructional goals and foster improved student achievement. (1.3)
 - Targeted programming such as the Math instructional block for direct instruction with an additional application/remediation period has led to effective scaffolded supports for students that include direct instruction with guided and independent practice. In a general education math class that was exploring capacity using liters and milliliters students were asked to work with a partner to determine the best unit to use to measure the capacity of certain containers that hold quantities of liquids such as milk, a pen cap, a sink, and other familiar containers. This allotted period enabled students to demonstrate their understanding by applying their knowledge to real world scenarios. In an integrated co-teaching setting, students were split into three groups and were engaged in a review of an earlier lesson based on their specific needs including a re-teach on different angle types, a review of the use of a protractor, or additional time to apply their knowledge of geometry. This resulted in better academic instruction and intervention for students facing the greatest academic

challenges both in integrated co-teaching and general education settings. These measures are aligned with instructional goals and have made closing the achievement gap for students who are most challenged academically more attainable as evidenced by progress gains in English language arts for the school's lowest third based on the 2011-2012 Progress Report.

- The majority of the faculty engages in collaborative teacher team practices resulting in increased strategic planning that strengthens teacher practice and improves student outcomes. (4.2)
 - Via collaborative team work teachers develop tasks and explore various strategies for instruction and resources such as the *Writing an Opinion* planning organizer. The passionately collegial teacher teams have focused their efforts on improving curriculum. For example, the fifth grade team has adapted a *Zoocosis* unit of study that encompasses the exploration of the merits and draw backs of zoo captivity on animals. The culminating performance task required students to compose a persuasive writing piece on whether zoos are helpful or harmful to endangered animals. Because the school has strategically aligned teacher team time with the departmentalization of the upper elementary grades, teachers share cohorts of students enabling them to focus more deeply on a reduced number of subjects. This results in actionable feedback that informs instructional decisions enabling teachers to continually adjust their practice to meet student needs. Additionally, across classrooms teachers analyze assessments using tools like the Grade 2 team's Envision Math data analysis tool which is used to identify student strengths and needs resulting in the formation of ability-based groups based on student outcome trends. Consequently, teachers are able to identify gaps in learning in order to address student deficiencies. This has resulted in improved student progress based on these efforts.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop teacher practice to foster rigorously academic instruction that meets student needs so that all learners produce meaningful student work. (1.2)
 - Across classrooms teachers use assessment practices during instruction. Teachers use observations of student at work to redirect any misunderstanding. However, lesson pacing and questioning techniques often do not yet encourage higher order thinking across classrooms. In several classrooms lessons were teacher-dominated limiting time for active student engagement. In addition, questions were lower level, fact-based and did not encourage application of content understandings. For example, in a math class students spent the majority of time viewing a video and answering the same fact-based questions with no scaffolding for students that may have needed it. In an English Language Arts class, students spent a significant part of the lesson completing a KWL exercise. Both circumstances limited the time for new learning opportunities that require higher order thinking through active participation and discussion resulting in a low level of cognitive demand.

- Develop school data analysis practices to identify student performance trends that effectively capture a composite of the school's academic achievements and struggles. (2.2)
 - Currently the school uses individual classroom data to assess school-wide trends. However, school leadership cannot yet articulate school-wide performance growth based on administered assessments to date. In addition, data tracking for subgroups is not yet a consistent practice. This limits the school's ability to efficiently aggregate and identify emerging school-wide trends which impedes the opportunity to make timely adjustments based on student outcome data to enhance school-wide processes regarding student achievement. Similarly, while student curricular tasks are regularly evaluated against rubric expectations, the alignment of grading practices to Common Core expectations and across subjects determined by teachers is not yet established and therefore lacks coherence. For example, the fifth grade teacher team does not yet have a common grading policy to determine student grades. This limits the ability to ensure coherence of school-wide policies and practices hindering the school's ability to accurately monitor student progress.

- Formalize regular classroom evaluation processes with individualized professional development supports to bolster teacher practices that promote improved student outcomes. (4.1)
 - The school's teacher development efforts were informed by participation in a Teacher Effectiveness Pilot (TEP) enabling school leaders and staff to reflect on teacher practice using a research-based rubric of expectations. However, school leaders' feedback from classroom observations is uneven in frequency and is, at times, contradictory. For example, written feedback commentary included, "*I observed your lesson was differentiated*". Comments from the same document also said, "*Some of the learning activities were not rigorous enough for all students*", and "*...I observed that some students did not engage in the activity.*" Likewise, differentiated school-wide professional growth opportunities based on observations and student work/data are limited resulting in the school's inability to match teacher development needs to needed professional development supports. These nuances result in a lack of clear next steps for pedagogical improvement limiting the ability to fully impact teacher growth to improve student achievement.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Seton Falls Elementary 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