

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Dr. M. H. Dunbar

PS 126

**175 W. 166 Street
Bronx
NY 10452**

Principal: Nadine Kee Foster

Dates of review: May 29 - 30, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Dolores Esposito

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

PS 126 is an elementary school with 735 students from Pre-Kindergarten through grade 6. The school population comprises 27% Black, 72% Hispanic, 0% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011-2012 was 92%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school fosters a supportive culture that enhances the academic and personal development of students, improving student progress in learning. (1.4)
 - The school's support staff works closely with teachers and administration to ensure that the school environment focuses on communication and safety. There are effective systems to ensure that all students are well known by adults in the building. Counselors, social workers and other support staff meet with individual students to provide guidance on learning habits and skills that support academic and personal behaviors. For example, the upper grade students participate in a RAIN (Right Attitude In Progress) program that promotes positive behaviors. Other programs such as Girls Power and Boy Scouts also reinforce these habits. The school's code of conduct and expectations are centered on Respect, Cooperation, Responsibility and Safety. Teachers recommend students for a "student of the month" celebration based on the expectations outlined. Both students and teachers receive certificates of recognition for their attendance. As a result, students are better equipped to work cooperatively during small group instruction, as evident during classroom visits. Additionally, a review of classroom incident reports reveals a decline in disruptive behavior, enabling teachers to focus more on instructional strategies in classrooms and less on student conduct.
 - The school leadership has systems in place to ensure that professional development opportunities support students and families. A strong guidance team implements positive behavioral intervention in collaboration with teachers and other support staff members and there are programs and partnerships that provide a wide range of interventions for students and families. The school also works closely with families and students on the middle school transition process and provide workshops for parents. These sessions are well attended and parents indicate that the workshops are helpful in providing guidance for this process. The Woody Crest after-school program is also well attended and parents reveal that students are making progress with reading and math skills. The after school performances and assemblies also provide opportunities for parents and staff to celebrate the success of students academically and in the arts. Students are recognized monthly for their academics, attendance and behavior. One student shared, "You need to work hard here", is the message in our school. "I enjoy learning about histograms in math class because it's fun". As a result, students benefit from the collaborative efforts of guidance counselors, social workers and teachers who coordinate programs and assemblies that teach Respect for All and Anti-Bullying, building a more cohesive culture that supports students academically.
- The principal effectively uses resources such as staff and student time, in alignment to the school's goals, resulting in meaningful student work products. (1.3)
 - The school has aligned resources to support the school's professional development plan in literacy and mathematics this year, with teachers receiving extensive support with planning and coaching around questioning techniques and strategies for differentiation, from the coach, assistant

principal and support staff from the network. In addition, there was key professional development on special education, facilitated by one of the university partners. Professional development is based on the instructional shifts that improve teaching practices and build on content knowledge across the grades. Students are programmed to use the math lab and enjoy going there to practice thinking skills, using the variety of technology tools purchased by the school. Through additional purchases of instructional materials, students also benefit from more non-fiction reading materials being available in classrooms. These resources lift the levels of student performance, as evident in student work samples that include reflective student responses, persuasive essays and students' use of strong academic content language in social studies and science, during instruction to strengthen their writing.

- School leaders structure weekly opportunities for teacher teams to meet and discuss curricula and instruction. In one team, teachers have developed their own norms to review student work, using grade level benchmarks. As a result, teachers revise their units, using the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) to inform the design of challenging academic tasks across content areas. For example, in math classrooms students are writing reflections about line plots, fractions and decimals, while in English language arts they compare and contrast points of view of characters. Similarly, in social studies, they are engaged in reading various articles about the first amendments, and in science they engage in tasks such as experiments with bird adaptation in the environment. These reflections, performance tasks and discussions result in improved instruction for students, enabling them to make relevant connections to their lives.
- Across classrooms, teachers use a variety of assessments that are aligned to curricula and drive adjustments to instruction at the classroom level, to improve learning outcomes for students. (2.2)
 - Teachers use a wide range of assessments to generate feedback that informs the progress of the school's goals. Teachers review and analyze Acuity, Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA), student work samples, baseline data and reading levels, to determine skills and priorities based on the CCLS. As a result of this collaborative team analysis, teachers identified writing and academic language development as one of the priorities across content areas and grade levels. Thus the school has developed various literacy and math units of study that are aligned to the CCLS, to infuse content and language objectives, using Webb's Depth of Knowledge, and foster language development in meaningful ways. Teachers also make adjustments and revisions to their units and lessons during their planning meetings. They incorporate strategies for English language learners and students with disabilities. These changes are evident in their lesson plans and grade level planning templates, which include students' strengths, needs, goals and strategies that need to be taught. In mathematics, teachers use questioning techniques to foster critical thinking skills during lessons, in order to assess students' understanding of number sense and measurement concepts. Additionally, in math classrooms, students work in groups and discuss their strategies for problem solving with their peers, using rubrics and checklists to monitor their progress in learning. Consequently, across classrooms, teachers provide students with oral and written feedback regularly and adjust curricula and instruction, using language and content strategies that help students reflect on their learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen the alignment of curricula to CCLS to incorporate rigorous academic tasks that effectively challenge all students and help close the achievement gap for all learners. (1.1)
 - The school has collaboratively organized teams that have worked to align curricula to the CCLS, using tools from the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Webb's Depth of Knowledge for planning and designing lessons and units. This is in response to the lack of alignment found in the school's two years of implementing a literacy program called "Journeys". In English Language Arts, the school has developed at least 5 units of study that emphasize key ideas aligned to the CCLS, with performance assessments developed by teachers. Some of these include informational reading and writing and argumentative discourse with rubrics and guiding questions to scaffold the content. In mathematics, they have also developed various CCLS units and work collaboratively with the network to infuse language and content strategies referring to Webb's Depth of Knowledge. This provides additional supports for students, as evident in some classrooms that use rigorous tasks that build on number sense, measurement and fluency to engage students. However, the development of rigorous tasks to strengthen critical thinking skills across all content areas and grade levels is still in an emergent phase as teachers continue to receive professional development to deepen their understanding of the instructional shifts. In addition, across content areas, tasks do not have sufficient entry points for all learners, including many English language learners and students with disabilities who do not have access to appropriate supports to effectively engage in rigorous work. Hence, all students do not have access to curricula and tasks that build their higher order thinking skills, limiting their progress towards grade level proficiency as well as college and career readiness.
- Expand the use of a common teaching framework to further develop teaching practices that include the use of scaffolding and challenging tasks to improve outcomes for all learners. (1.2)
 - The school uses a workshop model that provides students with opportunities to practice strategies and skills that are taught during the mini-lessons. In some classrooms, this structure is posted on the board or on a chart. During classroom visits, there was also evidence of objectives or skills posted on charts, SMART boards and written in lesson plans. Teachers use various questioning techniques to check for understanding and unpack key concepts that are being taught during mini-lessons and cooperative group work. In one classroom, students discussed adaptations and the use of physical traits in order to survive, using language and details from the article to build on each other's ideas. The teacher made good use of questioning techniques that fostered critical thinking and students were cognitively engaged in using protocols for discussion that created a risk free environment for learning. These activities engaged students in meaningful learning experiences, with reading and writing tasks that deepened their understanding of key concepts in science. However, engagement of all students in challenging tasks is not consistently evident across all classrooms and content areas. Additionally, there is a lack of scaffolding for some students who are struggling with grade level content, due to language or academic barriers, and the needs of some

students who are more advanced, are not being met effectively, as they are currently not challenged. In some classrooms, students were reading articles that they did not understand, with ineffective supports to access the content being taught. Consequently, all students are not making sufficient progress, as evidenced in various classrooms with English language learners.

- Refine the use of a research based teaching framework to drive observations of teacher practice, leading to feedback that improves teacher development and promotes coherence of instructional practices. (4.1)
 - The leadership has developed a schedule to coordinate cycles of formal and informal observations for staff members, in an effort to provide feedback for improvement. This work is also outlined in the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan and principal's performance goals, which identify the areas of focus, using the Danielson Framework to gauge instructional expectations. However, a review of formal and informal feedback reveals that there is a lack of specificity and alignment of the feedback to the school's stated instructional goals and the needs of individual teachers. The feedback provided to teachers is mostly generic and does not consistently provide clear expectations and specific guidance to improve teaching practices across the school. The administrative team currently does not use the stated research based framework to provide teachers with regular meaningful feedback. In addition, there is not sufficient and timely feedback provided to all teachers around data and student work. Further, there was limited evidence of written communication and follow up to effectively monitor progress and provide support to teachers. Therefore, teachers lack consistent access to focused and effective feedback that promotes their professional growth, hindering rapid improvement in teaching practices across the school.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Dr. Marjorie H. Dunbar	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