

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

The Ampark Neighborhood School

X344

3961B Hillman Ave

Bronx, NY 10463

Principal: Christine McCourt Milton

Dates of review: January 29 – 30, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Melodie Mashel

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

P.S. 344 is an elementary school with 294 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 11% Black, 57% Hispanic, 22% White, 9% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 3% 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 93.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) aligned curriculum engages students in cognitively demanding tasks that promote rigorous habits and support student learning. (1.1)
 - School wide immersion in Columbia University Teachers' College (TC) Reading and Writing Workshop ensures the school's curricular coherence and alignment of units of study in reading and writing to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE). Guidance from a consultant, Learner Centered Initiatives (LCI), ensures the "marriage" of the TC units to thematic units of study. Hence, in English language arts (ELA), kindergarten students study a unit "I am Unique", a unit which includes social studies content as well as content geared to support student social and emotional growth. Second graders study about birds in an ELA unit, a unit rich in science content. Units are designed with a focus on engaging students in higher order thinking through project based learning and real life learning experiences. Students speak of the "tons and tons" of projects they complete. In addition, demanding instructional tasks which require students to take a position and support their claim with evidence from reading and research, a key standard from CCLS ensures students foster rigorous habits. Some students speak proudly about their ability to debate a topic during class lessons. For example, in one unit of study, students debate whether the Hudson River is safe or unhealthy. As a result of the school's well designed curriculum, students are immersed in rigorous learning experiences that foster higher level thinking and support student learning, thus preparing them early in their education for college and careers.
 - Analysis of student work and ongoing review of data from Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) assessments, performance tasks, math baselines, student writing samples inform staff of the necessary revisions to the units of study. Supports from consultants ensure teachers analyze student work and identify gaps. Curricula and tasks are refined to meet student needs. Teacher modifications or extensions to units meet the needs of diverse learners. As a result of the close examination of student work and work products, the principal and staff created a menu of instructional strategies to implement in lessons to meet the needs of the English language learner (ELL) and special education students. For example, peer conferring, use of document camera for visuals, use of headphones on computer, use of books on tape are strategies developed to work with ELL students. The use of a study carrel, a 3 sided display board that provides private space as needed for a student and additional time for projects are strategies that are used for special education students. In addition, a review of the school's units indicate the school supports for students performing at or above the standards by ensuring "extended thinking authentic tasks" are added to the curriculum. For example, students participate in research groups around the topic of Native American culture or design an informational poster. As a result, all students including English language learners and special education students are steeped in cognitively challenging academic tasks that promote learning and extend student thinking.

- Across classrooms teacher practice reflects a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn that supports all learners. (1. 2)
 - Teaching practice emanates from the belief that children learn best if they are actively engaged in their learning. Student engagement is at the core of teacher practice. Visible classroom practices such as; student collaborative group work, independent research, partnership talk, stop and jots, stop and sketch, unit based projects, immerse all students in hands on learning experiences which promote student learning by doing. For example, kindergarten students engage in group work counting objects from a bag, using clipboards to write their responses to problems and another group counts cubes. A visit to another kindergarten class provided a similar experience. Students walked with clipboards were “writing the room,” a practice for collecting sight words, and another group worked on the computer designing Valentine’s Day cards using key vocabulary words. Hence, students work around the same concept; however, the group activities provide multiple entry points into the curricula and the learning experience. English language learners (ELLs) and special education students are strategically grouped with students where they engage in everyday conversations about their work that immerse them in academic language. In addition, the principal and staff have developed a cohesive practice that is grounded in the use of the workshop model, thus ensuring teachers confer with students and provide guided and active engagement opportunities to all students. As a result, all students engage in demanding tasks that require high levels of thinking and provide a range of entry points including extended thinking experiences for high performing students.

- Teachers develop and use common assessments to make curricula adjustments and inform instructional decisions that support student achievement. (2. 2)
 - School wide use of Fountas and Pinnell assessments, TC benchmarks, running records, teacher/student conferences, rubrics and pre- and post-performance task data, provide teachers with information about student work and achievement. Assessment results inform and facilitate the grouping of students for small group instruction and collaborative work enabling students to assess each other’s work and learn together. The groups do not remain static as teachers meet weekly to examine new student work and identify student strengths and needs and adjust groups as needed. Across grades students are engaged in the writing process. The use of rubrics and conference work with teachers provide students with actionable feedback that facilitates student goal setting and next learning steps to producing standard and above standard work. As a result, students are challenged and supported in reaching high levels of achievement.
 - A web-based curriculum management tool warehouses the school’s units of study and informs teachers of changes needed to meet the specific needs of students. The tool also tracks gaps and repetition in instruction and teachers make curricula adjustments. For example, as a result of looking closely at assessments and student work products, kindergarten and first grade teachers ensured greater differentiation of both the process and product in instruction. They added the use of additional visuals and the process of peer review to support student learning. Upper grade teachers chose to improve an instructional strategy by ensuring stronger teacher modeling to support student understanding of lessons taught. In addition, close review of student writing samples by teachers revealed students needed support with organizing their ideas to support a claim. Therefore, teachers added the use of a variety of concept maps that organizes student thinking and supports their understanding of the unit of study.

As a result of the in depth analyses of student work and assessments, teachers make informed curricula and pedagogical adjustments that support learning, ensuring all students are on track to meet the curricular and grade level goals.

- The principal aligns resources to support instructional goals that elevate student performance. (1.3)
 - The new principal quickly recognized the need to identify clear and strategic goals that would continue to accelerate student learning. The visionary principal hired Teachers College (TC) consultants to ensure the continued alignment of the school's units of study to CCLS and Learner Centered Initiatives (LCI) a consultant, to ensure the successful merger of the units with thematic lessons and projects. In addition, to complement one of the school's units of study, the school partners with the Audubon Society. The principal skillfully decided to use Teachers College Assessment Pro, a computer program that tracks student F & P levels to capture student progress in reading. In addition, particular attention was given to ensuring the school uses technology to support instruction. Hence, SMART boards, Elmo projectors, computers in all classrooms, and the availability of online digital books ensure all students have access to 21st century tools that place students on a pathway to college or career. Moreover, the principal and staff have designed a CCLS aligned report card that provides specific information to parents on how students are progressing toward mastery of the standards. As evidenced increased skill demonstration and volume of work provided in student work folders and displays of student projects, the principal's insightful organizational decisions continue to support the school's instructional goals and promote student achievement.
 - While most of the teaching assignments were in place prior to the principal's appointment, the principal has nonetheless made strategic decisions around hiring practices and reassignments. A three day a week reading specialist has been hired to provide intervention to the school's lowest performing students and enrichment opportunities for high performing students. Since some special education students' progress remained constant, in order to monitor and bolster their reading levels, the principal specifically tracked these students and redesigned the Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS) program. Contingent on specific needs of SETSS students services are now provided through both a "push in" or "pull out" model. Therefore, 62% of SETSS students progressed to grade level or above on TC benchmarks in reading. Moreover, an additional teacher has been hired to support upper grade students in building reading stamina and comprehension. English language learners (ELLS) are provided support from both the reading teacher and the English as a second language (ESL) teacher. As a result, since the beginning of the year 75% of ELL students demonstrate gains of two F & P levels. Hence, the principal's strong understanding of instruction and discerning goal setting has resulted in improved student performance.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop systems that support student social and emotional growth in order to promote academic and social behaviors. (1.4)
 - Students state they feel safe in the school, are treated well and respected by the adults in the school. They engage in a variety of experiences that support their

- social and emotional growth such as; participation in an inter-generational program with a local nursing home, participation in school sings and students go on frequent trips that build a sense of family and community in the school. The principal's implementation of round table discussions for upper grade students serves as the venue for them to discuss school concerns. However, students in lower grades are not part of this process, thus there are missed opportunities for younger students to express their concerns and voice their opinions.
- The school benefits from a well monitored attendance plan that effectively ensures the school's current attendance rate of 93%. Students and parents both state that students can approach the school's parent coordinator and nurse if they have concerns. The principal has identified one adult on each floor of the school as the point person for students to contact if there is an emergency or issue that may need to be addressed. However, formal structures for students to discuss all areas of school including academics and personal issues are not yet fully implemented, thus limiting the opportunity for students to express their concerns and maximize learning.
 - Strengthen teacher team collaborations to continue to build effective teacher leadership that improves teacher practice and supports student achievement. (4.2)
 - Teachers teams examine student work, work products and identify the strengths and needs of individual and groups of students. One teacher team determined students needed additional support around the use of conventions in student writing. Another teacher team ascertained that students needed work around the introduction of a topic in their writing. While both teams identified areas in which students needed additional support specific next steps for teacher practice to support the improvement of student work was not clearly indentified. As a result, there are missed opportunities for teachers to identify clear next steps to support student progress and achievement that prevents strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers, and limits higher levels of performance for students.
 - Vertical teacher teams meet at least once a week to examine student work. A lead teacher for each vertical team has been identified by the principal to facilitate the work. While teachers meet to discuss student work, a consultant guides much of the work, thus limiting the teacher role in making key shared decisions that promote student achievement or empowering them to continue to grow agreed upon reflective teacher practice.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: The Ampark Neighborhood 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