

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**The Amersfort School**

**22K119**

**3829 Avenue K  
Brooklyn  
NY 11210**

**Principal: Lisa Fernandez**

**Dates of review: October 24-25, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Dr. Rhonda Dawn Farkas**

## **Part 1: The school context**

### **Information about the school**

The Amersfort School is an elementary school with 421 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 74% Black, 10% Hispanic, 1% White, 11% Asian students, and 4% other students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 96.7%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders ensure that established coherent standards-aligned curricula incorporate rigorous tasks that are accessible to a variety of learners resulting in high levels of student achievement. (1.1)
  - Clear learning outcomes with matching assessments, engaging learning experiences, and instructional strategies are organized into sequenced units of study that serve as both the detailed road map and the high-quality delivery system for ensuring that all students attain grade-specific Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) standards across all subject areas. Units of study establish sequences both within and between levels and assure a coherent and articulated progression from grade to grade and also incorporate the school's Magnet theme of global and ethical studies. As a result, there are fewer gaps in students' written work as evidenced by writing samples that are well aligned with performance tasks and rubrics notably displayed in classrooms. During a visit to a fourth-grade class, students were focused on two CCLS tasks in which they were required to refer to details and examples in a text, explain what the text said explicitly, and draw inferences from the text as well as determine the main idea of a text, explain how it is supported by key details, and summarize the text demonstrating their thinking. The students were placed in groups based on formative assessment data that the teacher culled from her guided reading conference notes. Two groups had the same task but different texts entitled Bantu People, San People, and Khoikhoi People. A variety of graphic organizers was provided for the different groups to assist students as they identified the main idea and supporting details from the text and determined the importance of each detail cited. Another group used laptops to complete the assignment, and two English language learners had auditory-assisted computerized instruction with earphones as they worked on the same learning objectives using informational text. These examples reveal how decisions made by classroom teachers ensure alignment of curricula and enable all students, including the school's relevant subgroups, to exhibit higher-order in tasks that have resulted in increased student achievement and high-quality student work products.
- School leaders and staff work as a unified team to create a peaceful orderly environment that is highly conducive to learning, and results in personal and academic growth of all students. (1.4)
  - The principal ensures an inclusive environment and students, staff, and parents use common language reflecting the school's core values, such as respect, perseverance, resilience, and effort. Parents are provided a monthly syllabus on each grade, which delineates the CCLS aligned expectations for student mastery across subject areas to ensure a shared understanding of what is expected and what constitutes proficient work across curricula. At the end of each month, as part of the school's parent-teacher open communication, teachers send progress reports to parents, which include grades and rubrics so that families are apprised of how their children are progressing toward attainment of the goals delineated on the syllabi, linking student work to the CCLS. Moreover, these reports are

replete with teacher's specific comments and ways parents can assist their children at home. The reports are then signed by both the child and parent and are returned to school for continued tracking and monitoring of progress. In addition, the school's *At Your Service* program encourages students to maintain a steady presence in the lives of younger students and in school community efforts that strive to assist their junior peers with social and academic learning as well as organization skills and peace building during lunch recess periods. These crew members cultivate personal relationships, responsibility, and leadership skills, while serving as positive role models for younger students. Students interested in becoming crew members are required to write persuasive essays, replete with three paragraphs, including an introduction, supporting details, and a conclusion, and are also encouraged to submit a resume to the principal for consideration. The resume, a genre of writing learned by fifth graders as part of the school's English language arts enrichment, includes previous positions held, such as recycling leader, library assistant, computer monitor, or teacher's aide, as well as awards received for being recognized as student of the month or peace builder. As a result, students are deemed active partners and associates in school governance and improvement, which has led to meaningful interactions outside of the classroom that connect students with their peers and with other members of the school community.

- School leaders, in their collaborative approach to goal setting, have created a learning community that results in increased ownership by all stakeholders to leverage changes to increase student achievement. (3.1)
  - The school community fosters a trusting, respectful, and nurturing culture where students and staff are supported to achieve individualized learning goals and lead the development of an improvement plan that addresses learning needs. The school community values parents, as well as community members as partners and allies, who are empowered to be advocates for all children to ensure access to widespread and eclectic learning opportunities that support success. To ensure a common understanding of what is expected and what constitutes proficient work, the teachers produce, report, and widely disseminate accurate and objective achievement information that is accessible to families, formally on a monthly basis, as well as informally on a daily basis. In addition, school leaders collect and analyze school-wide assessment data, such as Fountas and Pinnell reading levels and students' writing samples, and identify students in need of additional support in English language arts and math. These practices have led to collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility among all of the school's stakeholders toward the school-wide goal to advance student achievement. As a result of deep analyses of data culled from a multiplicity of data sources, 7 out-of-classroom teachers articulate with 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom teachers to develop action plans to provide push-in services that support students, lower teacher-student ratios, and deliver small group, targeted instruction Monday-Thursday for 80 minutes. Additionally, the school's parent coordinator hosts various parent workshops, including, but not limited to, *How to communicate with your child effectively*, presented by the committee for Hispanic children and families, and a program sponsored by the Food Bank for New York City entitled *Cook Shop for Families*, a series of six free monthly cooking and nutrition workshops during which time family participants learn how prepare recipes, learn nutritional tips, and

receive ingredients to cook healthy and affordable recipes with their families. Other workshops include academic expectations for middle school and family curriculum nights. These approaches to inclusive involvement foster the ability of all constituencies to collaboratively work to strengthen learning at home.

- The school's strong partnerships with families and community agencies result in sustainable, responsive approaches that increase students' identification with their educational goals in preparation for college and careers. (3.4)
  - The school's collaborative culture values creativity and continuous improvement with a vision, as stated by the parents, "to become well rounded, both academically and socially, and build character development." The principal models and inspires self-awareness, reflective practice, creative problem solving, and civic behaviors that emulate the high expectations, which are communicated through these actions. In addition, school leaders engage students in a plethora of integrated cross-curricular projects and experiences that support a path to college and career readiness. For example, as champions of arts education, and through the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the school has a longstanding partnership with Brooklyn Information and Culture (BRIC) and hosts an eight-week program to support students' talents through the exploration of project-oriented work in the arts. This year, as part of the school's media arts sound club unit plan, students in grades 3-5 are exploring the art and science of sound by producing and performing their own musical compositions and hand-made instruments, which will culminate in a live performance. In addition, the school, which is among 10 public schools across Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, will feature students' artwork in a variety of media, including painting, quilting, collage, poetry, and photography in the *I Am You/You Are Me* 24th Annual BRIC Contemporary Art Education Exhibition, as well as at the school's annual Magnet Expo. These partnerships, along with various multimedia experiences and weekly shared goal setting by students, have benefitted all learners, who exert deliberate effort, are well poised, diversified, self-confident individuals, and are resolute in pursuit of their objectives, as evidenced by their goal reflections and high-level work products.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Strengthen the use of instructional strategies to support targeted instruction, high levels of student engagement, and ensure suitable challenge across classrooms. (1.2)
  - Teachers plan instructional units collaboratively that include learning objectives, grade appropriate CCLS, essential questions, materials, vocabulary, procedures, and group assignments. However, teachers' approaches to employ methods of inquiry to promote collaborative learning opportunities for students and elicit student-generated questions are uneven across the school. Whereas in some classrooms students were asked to explain their answers orally or in writing, other students were allowed to provide only one-word or unison answers. This was evident in math lessons, where one teacher asked, "How does place value help you identify and extend counting patterns?" and another teacher, during an introductory lesson to line plots, asked, "Do you think that line plot is a

good way to display data?” In the latter example, students provided one-word answers, which limited their abilities to engage in high levels of thinking and participation. Furthermore, teachers’ abilities to vary access points and adjust the level of task complexity and pacing according to student readiness are inconsistent across classrooms. In another lesson, students were completing grade appropriate assignments in workbook pages, and thus, were not afforded scaffolds or approaches that would allow for multiple entry points into the learning. Hence, opportunities to consistently provide teaching strategies that allow for student access to learning and increase the upward trajectory of student independence are thwarted.

- Deepen the coherence of assessment practices to align key standards and CCLS tasks to ensure meaningful feedback to students and teachers to effectively adjust curriculum to meet the needs of all learners. (2.2)
  - Teacher teams create and utilize standards-based assessments and rubrics to inform classroom level decisions after each unit. Evidence of rubric-based commentaries by teachers was noted on student writing posted inside classrooms and on hallway bulletin boards. However, structures for gathering assessment data that include ongoing checks for understanding during the natural flow of daily instruction, recording close observations of students to track progress of data-defined student needs, engaging students in self- and peer-assessment, and implementing dynamic interventions that are finely tuned to students’ ongoing progress, are uneven across classrooms. Thus, the ability of teachers to analyze data at a granular level with a focus on key sub-groups of students, to make immediate adjustments to instruction and give actionable feedback to students is hampered.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Amersfort School	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			X				
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?			X				
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the 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					
<b>School Culture</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports 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 those expectations?				X			
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<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 student 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 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?			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				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>