

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

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PS/IS 137

**121 Saratoga Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11412**

Principal: Zina Cooper-Williams

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Lead Reviewer: Mauricière de Govia

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

PS/IS 137 is a Pre K-8 school with 312 students from Pre-K through grade 8. The school population comprises 73% Black, 18% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 88.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and instructional shifts so that rigorous and higher-order thinking tasks are accessible to all learners. (1.1)
 - The school's early engagement with the CCLS led to the adoption of the *Reading Street* and *Prentice Hall* programs as anchors that have created curricular coherence across the grades. These curricula were chosen in collaboration between the teachers and the administrators. They wanted curricula that supported all learners. The unified curricula allow for consistence in the teaching of vocabulary and influences how teachers plan lessons. The latter contained elements of Webb's Depth of Knowledge, strategic questioning, and differentiation of groups. Data-based decision making was evident as teachers utilized their meeting time and professional development opportunities to discuss curricular adjustments that infuse the instructional shifts such as determining vocabulary instruction and building reading comprehension through improving questioning among students via annotation and accountable talk between students and teachers. Teachers also reviewed student work to influence the direction of lessons as comments about re-teaching and "I have to approach the lesson differently based on his (the student's) response." Were voiced by collaborating teachers. For English language learners and special education students, teachers consistently demonstrated in meetings that they review Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals to tailor and meet the specific needs of students utilizing the same resources with lesson modifications applied. As a result of these practices, it is evident that the school is committed to developing academic tasks that emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills across grades and subjects for all students; including English language learners and special education students.
- The school administers a variety of assessments aligned to the curricula that are analyzed in order to provide actionable feedback to students and determine progress toward grade level standards. (2.2)
 - The principal has a strong understanding of how to manage and mobilize data into action in the school community. Her effective management of data has enabled teachers to access and efficiently utilize it in meaningful ways that has positively impacted students' performance and progress. To accomplish this, the school administers several assessments including; but not limited to *IReady*, *Fountas and Pinnell*, *Performance Series*, *Reading Street* and *Prentice Hall Assessments* as tools that are used to diagnose student progress and performance. Teacher teams were witnessed analyzing data from the assessments provided on *School Net* and discussing the next instructional steps for students. This practice has influenced the direction of school-wide curriculum and assessment. For example, this practice led to teachers placing greater emphasis on asking higher order thinking questions and pushing higher levels accountable talk between teachers and students and students to students. This outcome was evident in teachers' lesson plans which contained sections dedicated to questioning and tasks that engaged

students through talk. Furthermore, actionable feedback from assessments are provided to students on post-it notes and aligned to rubrics that are attached to student work products. Lastly, the school employs a home-school connection by ensuring that students receive progress reports three times a year, in addition to standards-based report cards that are distributed to students four times a year. These assessment practices demonstrate that the school effectively uses common assessments to determine student progress towards goals as teachers strategically collaborate to ensure that assessment outcomes impact curriculum and future pedagogical steps.

- Teacher teams meet regularly to collaborate and analyze data; including student work, to make decisions about instructional strategies that result in improved teacher practice and student progress. (4.2)
 - A highlight at the school is the teacher teamwork that occurs on a weekly basis. The principal is an advocate for teacher collaboration. She expressed that she established teacher teams to empower teachers and to give them an opportunity to work and plan together. Her sentiments are obvious as teacher teams are positioned to be the nucleus of instruction, assessment, and professional development for the faculty at the school. Teachers are scheduled to meet formally but many expressed that they also meet informally several times throughout the week. During a team meeting, the Special Education team was seen utilizing data from School Net to develop IEP goals for students. The teachers assessed the students' data and surfaced the implications for teaching which was to build the students' mathematical fluency to meet the demands of the Common Core Learning Standards. The conversation about students' performance led the teachers to incorporate the Common Core Learning Standards into lesson plans and curriculum development for the team. In a grade team meeting, teachers were assessing the quality of a student's writing while offering assistance to a team member in determining next instructional steps reflected by the student's work. Teachers also use the team model to provide professional development to one another through workshops, inter-visitations, one-to-one coaching, and informal feedback. Teachers voiced that these opportunities have been transformative to their teaching as their colleagues provide new insight about their teaching practices. For example one teacher talked about the benefit from going from "resistant" to "receptive" and "trusting" her colleagues as having her "best interest" in improving. This teacher talked about how her analysis of student work products has improved as a result of her colleagues asking questions and pushing her thinking. Furthermore, the teachers shared that it has been especially evident with the collaboration around lesson planning and inter-visitations where teachers receive feedback from their colleagues. Another teacher echoed her colleague's sentiment by stating, "Teachers are getting more trusting and are less resistant." As a result of these practices a majority of the teachers are active participants on teams that are focused on the improvement of instructional common core aligned practices and the analysis of data and student work to improve teacher practice and student outcomes.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen teacher capacity so that instructional strategies provide multiple entry points into curricula and challenging tasks in order to promote high levels of thinking for a diversity of learners. (1.2)
 - Across classrooms teaching strategies inconsistently provided multiple entry points into the curricula. This practice led to uneven student participation in tasks with reduced opportunities for high-order thinking to be demonstrated by the students. In some classrooms, higher-order thinking questions were posed such as “What is the best way to find the truth?” and “Why might someone flee for safety?” While in other classrooms, teachers asked lower level questions such as “What is the genre?” and “What is a tall tale?” Teachers’ voices dominated most of the lessons observed. In one classroom, a teacher repeated everything the students shared. This fostered a lack of need for students to listen to each other. In a few classrooms, teachers employed differentiation strategies such as grouping students based on task or level and assessing various groups of learners using rubrics with categories such as “*practitioner*”, “*apprentice*”, “*expert*”. Students responded positively in those classroom environments by actively engaging in the work and asking clarifying questions to help them navigate through the task. As a result of these teaching practices, instructional and pedagogical coherence was compromised. Consequently, many students observed were positioned to be passive learners because they were asked lower-level questions and therefore, demonstrated low levels of engagement and higher-order thinking skills.

- Continue to build school culture through the alignment of professional development, parent outreach, and student learning experiences and supports that promote academic and personal behaviors. (1.4)
 - Throughout the culture of the school there are more informal than formal structures for students to have voice and interact with school personnel. During conversations with students they shared that they appreciated having a student government in place this year in the upper grades and that “access to the guidance counselor” is valued. However, they were unclear and unable to express what it means to be successful in their school. Furthermore, they couldn’t name expectations they were being held to that would make them achieve success. For example, students could not speak to expected organizational skills, work-habits, or self-regulation activities that occur throughout their time in the school. Students voiced reliance on “teacher support” as opposed to rubrics, an advisory curriculum, or standards of behavior in statements such as “I know I am right when my teacher tells me.” And, “I just ask my teacher.” These statements indicate a reliance on the teachers’ opinion or word as opposed to a standard compass which students should be able to refer to as a guide towards improving academic and personal achievement and behaviors that lead to academic success. Conversations with parents also revealed similar challenges. Family outreach is limited, and only goes home in English while there are Spanish speaking parents and

families in attendance at the school. Parent workshops are also limited. The lack of this structure fails to assist parents with a clear understanding about what their child needs, is learning in school, and how they can reinforce it at home. Lastly, the school community inconsistently provides socio-emotional learning and youth development opportunities across the grades. The upper grades, 6-8 are given more opportunities to influence and engage in school culture more than the lower grades. For example, student government plans trips, parties, and events that occur at the school. Teachers rarely engage in professional development that fosters growth in the area of student; which in turn impacts the school community's ability to foster and develop structured pathways for students to achieve success academically and personally. A teacher said, "Our meetings are usually about student academic work and now data...sometimes we talk about students' behaviors." These practices facilitate a disconnect between professional development, family outreach, and student learning experiences resulting in ineffective structures that fail to promote academic and personal behaviors that lead towards success.

- Build upon classroom observations to align feedback, next steps and professional development supports to the Danielson Framework in order to promote teacher growth. (4.1)
 - The school is in the primary stages of engaging teachers with expectations of the Danielson framework. Observation feedback cites areas for growth such as higher-order questioning, student engagement, and the development of lesson plans to meet the instructional needs of students. The administrators' feedback to teachers is evidence-based, but does not provide actionable next steps that can support teachers through a professional development structure or plan that is differentiated and assessed for growth. There is an observation calendar that includes the dates, the observer, the teacher with a section to check for completion, but it doesn't account for how observations, feedback, and professional development are aligned to improve instructional practices in the classroom. The lack of those connections fosters a compliance checklist approach to conducting observations. Furthermore, the feedback observed failed to deliver a specified direction for teachers to attain differentiated support for areas of growth. For example, teachers were told, "You need to ask higher level questions." But they were not guided as to how they would improve this specific practice. When asked, teachers were unclear as to how to monitor and improve their own practice and navigate the Danielson rubric from ineffective to highly effective. These practices have led to teachers being passive participants in their own development without differentiated or strategic assistance resulting in inconsistent delivery of professional development that is linked to what teachers need to learn to support student mastery of the common core standards.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: 23K137 Rachel Jean Williams 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 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				
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 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				
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 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				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed