

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

ISAAC PITKIN

Elementary School 159

**2781 PITKIN AVENUE
BROOKLYN
NY 11208**

Principal: MONICA DUNCAN

Dates of review: December 11 - 12, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Joyce Stallings-Harte

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

P.S. 159 is an elementary school with 872 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 45% Black, 24% Hispanic, 1% White, and 29% Asian students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 92.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Assessments, aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and curricula, are used to inform instructional modifications as well as student learning targets to promote increased student achievement. (2.2)
 - The school uses multiple assessments that teachers and administration analyze and use to adjust instruction attending to the needs of all learners. Assessments that are monitored on a regular basis include beginning-of-year assessments, pre- and post- unit assessments, performance tasks, benchmark assessments and end-of-year assessments. Data from beginning of year assessments, performance tasks in English language arts and math, and Fountas and Pinnell reading levels is uploaded onto spreadsheets to note item analysis and student performance leading to congruent identification of class and grade-wide trends as well as individual student learning needs. The school uses unit tests planned, by teacher teams, with checklists and rubrics aligned to CCLS, a common grading policy, and pre- and post- assessments to ascertain whether students have met the unit goals. This data is collected, evaluated and used to modify instruction for the following week of instruction. For example, teachers decided to use kinesthetic and visual supports and integrate an online IXL math intervention program for students in a 4th grade class evidencing difficulty with estimation. Teams of teachers meet regularly to create common assessments. Student Data Binders, which include all student assessments, are reviewed by the teacher, student and administration and used to plan further instructional steps and track student progress. During one team meeting, review of data revealed English language learners were not improving in reading comprehension due to a lack of adequate vocabulary acquisition. The decision was made to refocus teaching efforts on explicit vocabulary development. Teachers record student progress on the data spreadsheet and observed notable improvement in reading comprehension. The principal's Data Binder, derived from teacher collected student data, showed that based on the New York State Performance Assessment, students were demonstrating an accurate understanding of the details from the text. In addition, all students were able to accurately show evidence of linking words and phrases. On this same assessment, student with disabilities were found to have difficulty with stating and supporting their opinion. The next instructional steps indicated teachers were to include more explicit modeling of citing textual evidence for the upcoming lessons and monitoring progress. This system provides teachers with actionable feedback on student learning that ensures effective instructional adjustments are made in a timely fashion and therefore improving student performance and achievement.
- The school aligns curricula to CCLS and content standards to provide challenging learning opportunities for all students. (1.1)
 - Core curriculum, aligned to state standards and CCLS, accommodates a range of students of varying learning levels with rigorous tasks and activities that call for higher order skills strategically chosen in order to

engage all learners. This is highlighted by the school's selection of Go Math last school year, which was piloted in a kindergarten class. The school kept Go Math because their experience showed that it addressed the academic needs of all learners including English language learners, students with disabilities, and students with a range of abilities. All students having difficulties solving word problems were able to evidence multiple ways of problem solving both written and verbally. In order to increase literacy across content areas, the performance arts curricula requires that students use the stated focus skills, student-to-student discussion and problem-solving skills in the performing arts. Teacher teams plan across grades and in vertical teams and look at the curriculum maps and student data. Monthly, the special education team and the English language learners' team meet to ensure that there is coherence across grades. The curriculum maps indicate teachers plan writing across content areas using rubric and checklists for coherency. The school-wide foci on higher order thinking skills across content areas and student-to-student discussion has resulted in students having access to coherent rigorous CCLS aligned tasks across grades and subject areas.

- School leaders make deliberate decisions and organizational modifications that advance instructional goals and support student learning. (1.3)
 - The principal opened two new Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classes based upon the school's belief that children should receive instruction in the least restrictive environment. Rather than opt for a self-contained classroom, the school chose to start with the ICT and present anecdotal evidence of progress of students. These classes are intentionally staffed with a veteran and new teacher in order to increase and strengthen pedagogical practices. School leaders modify teaching assignments and schedules to match the instructional expertise with identified student needs. Students with disabilities and English language learners receive targeted instruction through computer-based programs; Reading A-Z and Achieve 3000, which promote increased focus and attention to tasks while minimizing disruptive behaviors. Technology is used to provide opportunities for students to express their understanding in multiple ways. For example, one student was not able to perform well on written assignments and the principal recommended that the student use a laptop in order to process information yielding engagement in higher-level tasks. Modifications such as this indicate that students are able to produce exemplary work and these accommodations are made for all learners as students receive individual laptops. Using technology as a means to target learning styles and needs of students with varying abilities has contributed to growth and progress in student reading achievement this year versus last year. Additionally, teacher collaboration through the ICT model and as well as increased teacher collaboration in general have created more targeted learning interventions for all students and accelerated progress.
- School leaders participate in targeted cycles of observation with identified Danielson competencies and provide constructive feedback and meaningful professional development that strengthens pedagogy. (4.1)
 - The Danielson framework informs the school's pedagogical expectations in order to improve teaching practices and observation feedback. In

response to the need to address instructional practices expeditiously, the principal implemented a rigorous observation schedule with shortened response time. School leadership sought to provide teachers in-depth oral and written feedback in which actionable next steps are given with hard timelines for improvement. For example, during an observation in which the teacher was using a running record to assess students, the observation was made that students could assess their own work and that of their peers while editing. The recommendation was made to introduce and norm a rubric with students that they would use to self and peer assess. Another example of feedback indicated the principal's observation focus was on assessing student comprehension and monitoring all students groups for checks for understanding. It was accompanied with a hard timeline for a second visit in a week. One teacher commented that feedback led to the use of a checklist during peer-to-peer feedback. Administrators conduct frequent and regular short observations that focus on providing opportunities for student-to-student discussion and citing text to support opinions. Pedagogical supports are varied according to their individual needs. For example, in the class of a veteran teacher, observations reports show review of multiple Danielson competencies with recommendations for implementing self-assessment and peer-editing through the use of rubrics with follow-up by administration in a week, while in a first grade observation of another teacher, multiple Danielson competencies were also observed with recommendations in the schools identified focus, engaging students in higher order thinking through a minimum of 3 higher order thinking questions per lesson. This differentiation in feedback meets the varying needs of both new and veteran teachers and serves to improve teaching practices and support improved student success.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen teaching practices for consistency that deepen students' higher order thinking skills and promote rigor for all students. (1.2)
 - The school's stated beliefs about student learning supports student engagement through varied entry points in lessons and the use of instructional strategies that provide each student with activities that stretch their thinking. The tasks are differentiated and students engage in flexible grouping based upon student-identified needs. The school prides itself on student 'choice and voice' where for example students are given the opportunity to select 3 of a possible 5 questions to answer in math. The school believes in the least amount of interruption during class time and has provided one laptop for every two students for technology support and for students with disabilities one laptop per student. Teachers provide differentiated supports for students based upon their learning styles and needs. For example, during a guided practice portion of the lesson, students worked in teams and used a rubric to analyze student work. Students were then asked to offer their opinion about the effectiveness of the informational piece based upon the rubric and what recommendations they would give the writer. Across classes, teachers engage students in learning activities that push them to think and respond deeply to prompts from the teacher and peers as evidenced in a class discussion linking important details in an expository text to craft a written summary. Students used the text to support their statements and explored summarizing strategies. While learning activities such as this

and many others with built-in structures provided opportunities for small group work and student-to-student dialogue, in few classes, teachers intervened in the conversation that led to student to teacher response and limited student dialogue. As a result, teacher-centered and directed discussion is limiting higher levels of participation, higher order engagement and accelerated achievement for some students.

- Build on efforts that encourage student voice and promote effective academic and personal behaviors for students to ensure a positive school environment. (1.4)
 - The principal speaks assuredly about the open door policy where parents wait no more than five minutes to meet with staff and where student voice is desired and welcomed. Parents report that they simply look at the teacher's schedule to know when the teacher has free time and that they can easily meet with teachers. Additionally parents reported that they get weekly progress reports as needed and monthly school letters, which indicate what their child will learn for the month. The school seeks to improve its learning environment and develop citizenship skills through a character education initiative; 'The Word of the Month' such as 'caring'. Additionally, the guidance counselor identifies students for extra support in citizenship skills via small group sessions. Parents report that the school creates a safe and comfortable learning environment. For example, a parent stated that her child with disabilities was being bullied and now credits character education programs and zero-tolerance policy for the increase in her daughter's self-esteem. Parents also report that the school provides motivational programs such as theater and chorus and that these activities help to promote social skills for students. One parent said that her daughter was not enjoying school, but now because of her participation in these programs as well as teacher investment, she is enjoying learning more and is making progress. Staff seeks to encourage student 'voice and choice' and good collaborative habits through group work where students take responsibility for their learning and through the student-to-student discussion. Students report that there are teachers available for them if they need support academically or socially. Conversely, a few students reported that they would like opportunities to be selected for extra activities such as Student Council as currently teachers select the students who participate. While the school has improved the social climate, structures are not in place for students to have input in making decisions that impact their school, resulting in a school culture where student voice is not valued school-wide.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: ISAAC PITKIN	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