

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**The Caesar Rodney School**

**Elementary School K164**

**4211 – 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 12219**

**Principal: Margaret Choy-Shan**

**Dates of review: May 5-6, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Karina Costantino**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Caesar Rodney is an elementary school with 527 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 2% Black, 57% Hispanic, 11% White, and 27% Asian students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 20% 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 95.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is well developed.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school's curriculum is aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCLS), rigorous, coherent and engages a variety of learners. (1.1)
  - To deepen the work of balanced literacy, the school is currently using the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, which provides all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, with an ambitious, researched-based curriculum that is aligned to the CCLS and provides consistency of skills and strategies across grades. English as a second language teachers (ESL) push in classrooms for half a day to provide entry points for English language learners to build up to the complex texts, using the same content, but using different strategies. The program also provides students with complex texts that engage students in higher order, rigorous tasks in reading and writing. In one third grade class, the students are required to read *Ruby Bridges* and they were discussing what the author made them think about and the connections they could then make to their own real life experiences. The high performing students are expected to discuss how to formulate a theory about two different subjects using two different texts within the same genre. Students then compare the book *Ruby Bridges* to the book *The Beatles* and look for similarities in author's purpose. Fourth grade students are expected to read using their inner voice for reactions, connections and wonderings about the Battle of Long Island in social studies. The students are required to look at maps for additional information and then formulate their ideas into open ended questions, which force other students to think about the text in different ways and push their thinking. All classrooms reflect Tier 1, 2 and 3 words to enrich vocabulary use in the four modalities of literacy. A partnership with the Metropolitan Opera Guild provides students with the ability to adopt source material and strengthen their verbal communication skills. Through the use of Opera Based learning strategies, language skills have improved. Curriculum themed, inquiry-based science kits were used to develop a Garden Club to deepen the depth of students' environmental science knowledge through the application of hands on real life experiences. This type of project-based learning results in a rich educational environment for students to achieve academic success and prepare them for college and career readiness.
- Teachers practice routinely reflects school wide beliefs about how students learn best, is aligned to the CCLS, and requires students to engage in higher-level thinking that results in increased academic performance. (1.2)
  - Across the vast majority of classrooms, grades and content areas, there is coherent, effective teaching. As early as kindergarten, children use rubrics and how-to checklists to begin to develop in them the ability to reflect on their own work and writing pieces. These checklists evolved from grades 1-5. The checklists, created by the students, and the student rubrics empower students to self-assess and determine their own next steps, preparing them for college and career readiness. For example, one grade 4 class created a checklist answering the question, "How do I Know My Informational Poster is Effective?" In addition, students have rich

discussions with a technique the school calls “High Bounce Ball” where students are encouraged to continue a class discussion with their school-yard, louder informal voices to make a point. Another child will bounce off of one student’s answer to agree, disagree or add on. All classrooms have prompts posted to remind students of sentence starters allowing them to engage in rich discussion, with the teacher being the facilitator. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides scaffolding of questions to provide entry points and assistance to English language learners and special needs students. In addition, teachers have been trained in Depth of Knowledge and evidence of rich discussion substantiated by text evidence is seen across classrooms. All of this movement for student independence has led to increased student achievement as evidenced by the school’s latest Teachers College performance assessment, showing an increase in 3 to 4 independent reading levels for the lower grades and 2 to 3 levels of independent reading levels for the upper grades.

- The principal makes strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet students’ learning needs as evidenced by improved pedagogy and student work. (1.3)
  - The principal’s decision to move to using Teachers College Reading and Writing Project as the school’s curriculum for literacy provided the staff with consistent and cohesive professional development and support that is targeted toward the specific needs of individual teachers. In addition, the principal developed lab sites within the school for her teachers to visit in order to see best practices. The principal created a schedule which provides all teachers on each grade with a common preparation period once a day to focus on inquiry work and adjust curriculum accordingly. Each day there is also an academic intervention period scheduled where all support and cluster personnel are assigned to classrooms to provide assistance to small groups of students in reading. The school also has a beginning program for English language learners on Saturday morning, as well as extended day math support. The arts are also offered after school for grade 5 chorus, band and newspaper club. In addition, Smart Works is a program that provides parents and their children a strong visual arts program aligned with literacy in the content area, this year being social studies. These programs have been organized to prepare students to be college and career ready by giving them academic support as well as enrichment opportunities. This provides children with the ability to be well rounded and to have experiences that engage them and make them critical thinkers, such as the school Green Team which plants a garden and focuses on healthy eating and the partnership with the Metropolitan Opera where students experience and perform the language of opera.
- The principal uses the Danielson Framework to conduct focused observations of teacher practice that leads to their understanding of best practices, resulting in increased professional growth. (4.1)
  - Over the past two years, the principal has focused on various competencies in the Danielson Framework for Teaching rubric. During many professional development sessions, teachers indicate that they have immersed themselves in the rubric. Viewing videos with a lens on Domain 3, taking low inference observation notes, as well as calibrating the ratings of the observations, gave them a shared understanding of effective instruction. In addition, leadership shared lesson plan templates

with teachers, particularly new teachers, in order to include the components in Domain 1, planning and preparation, where teachers may need additional assistance. Most of the teachers selected to do formal observations and the principal and her assistant principal conducted pre- and post-observation conferences. For those teachers that selected informal observations, the principal and assistant principal provided specific, timely and actionable next steps with a particular focus to school wide goals of assessment, questioning and discussion techniques. Teachers created their own professional goals in September and October and then used the framework to reflect on those goals in which they needed to strengthen in order to improve their pedagogy. In February, the principal met with each teacher to assess their progress and to determine whether a new goal should be created or if they should continue working on their current goals. In May, the principal plans to have final meetings to see if all teachers have met their goals. The success of these strategies is noted in the improvement of teacher rating on ADVANCE. Currently, 38% of the teachers are rated highly effective and 57% are rated effective, where in September 30% were rated highly effective and 63% were rated effective, revealing a substantial increase in the number of teachers rated highly effective.

- Engaging in professional teacher teams across the school and focusing on student work, teachers use an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and improves student progress. (4.2)
  - All teachers are engaged in inquiry work and the school has a School Data team as well, with representatives from all grades and support personnel, such as the English as a second language teacher and the Special needs teachers that represent the grades. Inquiry teams meet once a week and have an opportunity to look at student work on each grade level compare it to the CCLS and note the increasing sophistication of student work throughout the grades. The representative from the School Data Team then shares out the information with the grade they represent. Every team has a facilitator and conducts itself according to a common protocol with an agenda. Discussing the results from a recent workshop on lifting the quality of student writing, each member of the staff filled out an exit slip and the team was reviewing the exit slips. After a rich discussion, they concluded what supports would be needed as grades began vertical planning. For example, they discussed how the entire school could benefit from the use of exemplars across subjects. At a grade 5 team meeting one teacher reviewed the discussion held at the School Wide Data Team meeting and the teachers agreed that it would be very beneficial to also review exemplars from grade 6 to further push student thinking and establish school-wide norms for writing. These meetings demonstrate the common expectation across grades to promote and fine tune teacher practice in order to achieve excellence school-wide.
  - The teachers use a number of assessments to track student progress in English language arts and math. Using formative and summative data to ensure that lessons are thoughtfully planned and scaffolded to engage students in challenging tasks, teachers are helping all students to make progress, including not only low performing students but also high performing students. GoMath! provides exemplars and benchmarking, which are also shared with parents using the math tracking from the program. The Teachers College Assessment is used in all grades, including Fountas and Pinnell. In addition, the technology teacher

provides the lower grade teachers from kindergarten to grade 2 with the progress their students make with sight word levels throughout the year. In addition, the teachers track progress in classrooms by using strategies such as turn and talk, white boards, exit slips and listen in, which results in improved practice as instruction is adjusted to meet the needs of students during the lesson. This is evidenced by the success and gains students have made in kindergarten through grade 2 in samples of student work.

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

- Deepen school wide assessment practices to strategically monitor students' progress and checks for understanding to adjust curricula and instruction, thereby accelerating learning for all students. (2.2)
  - Common assessments determine academic progress across the school for all students including English language learners and special needs students. This is apparent in most classrooms, where teachers adjust practice based on students' individual needs. However, in some classrooms, there is an absence of providing rigor and adjusting instruction for high performing students. This results in missed opportunities to provide these students with activities to deepen higher order thinking skills. In addition, there is no specified tracking in all subjects of high performing students in science and social studies, thus impeding efforts to create a clear picture of their progress and create more challenging activities to specifically meet their areas of need in these areas.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Caesar Rodney School	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score				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>