

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Mill Basin**

**Elementary School 236**

**6302 Avenue U  
Brooklyn  
NY 11234**

**Principal: Salil Paingankar**

**Dates of review: May 13 - 14, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Maria Robustelli**

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

### **Information about the school**

Mill Basin is an elementary school with 581 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 23% Black, 12% Hispanic, 54% White, and 9% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.4%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school offers a rigorous, standards based curriculum that provides all learners access to a wide range of learning experiences in preparation for college and career readiness. (1.1)
  - The school has implemented the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) recommended curriculum in English language arts and math to further integrate the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the instructional shifts. The staff also reviewed curriculum maps from all grade levels with an emphasis to examine the content coupled with student work samples so that all learning tasks align to the CCLS, and provide access to cognitively engaging tasks for all learners. Furthermore, the school decided to focus on maintaining a balance between informational and literary text and integrating text based evidence in writing and discussions, development of academic vocabulary, and math fluency to increase coherence across grades and subjects. This was evident in a fourth grade science lesson plan and a fifth grade English language arts plan where students were asked to cite text-based evidence to support their claims in writing and verbally. Accordingly, lesson plans reviewed included learning activities that require application of academic vocabulary, activities with scaffolds, and opportunities for reinforcement and extensions to ensure that tasks engage students in thinking. Moreover, curriculum reviewed demonstrated activities aligned with standards based objectives, and units provide an interdisciplinary approach to learning that serves to promote engagement and high levels of thinking. For example, specialty area teachers such as visual arts, computer, movement, and science collaborate with classroom teachers to develop interdisciplinary units to ensure coherence across the school and alignment to the CCLS. In addition, based on an analysis of school-wide data and ongoing observations, the school has also identified a need to focus on foundational skills in the earlier grades, kindergarten through grade 2, so adjustments to curriculum included supplemental integration of Wilson Foundations to develop learning opportunities and scaffolds to support the achievement of targeted academic needs. As a result of the school's efforts to refine curricula to plan opportunities that foster engagement, the school emphasizes college and career readiness skills for all students as evidenced in learning tasks.
- Consistent beliefs about student learning resonate in school-wide discussions guided by the Danielson Framework to ensure student engagement reflects high levels of thinking and participation. (1.2)
  - The school believes that students learn best when they are actively engaged and when targeted instruction provides support to various learning styles and student interests. Across the school, classrooms provide learning environments where students are challenged to engage in higher order thinking tasks through the use of academic vocabulary and classroom discussions. As a result, students assumed responsibility for their own learning by questioning each other's thinking. For example, during a fourth grade lesson on earthquakes, the teacher modeled how to answer key questions with a partner using a rubric to foster students' capacity to develop effective questioning skills. Students engaged in small group conversations to discuss their responses supported by evidence from the text, used a rubric to ask clarifying questions, and provided descriptive feedback and next steps to their peers. In addition, lessons are consistently informed by the Danielson

Framework to further support increased instructional practices for engaging all students in learning. As a result, the third grade has demonstrated an 8% increase in level 3 and 4 scores on the English language arts Performance Series from January 2014 to May 2014.

- Staff has created a “Best Practices for Instruction” document to provide consistency across grades and classrooms, and to support teachers in ensuring effective entry points for all learners. This included appropriate scaffolds and extensions to the curriculum to create an environment in which all students, including English language learners and special education students, participate in high levels of thinking. For example, across classrooms, teachers consistently used peer partners, technology, varied levels of questioning, verbal prompting, concept walls, and picture cues as multiple entry points into learning to target students’ strengths and needs. Similarly, during a third grade math lesson on perimeter, students worked together in small groups and pairs to solve equations while discussing several strategies to solve the math problem. Students were given an opportunity to explain their thought process and defend their work, thus resulting in high levels of engagement and critical thinking skills. Moreover, the questions generated by students and the teacher amplified cognition in which the concepts raised in the lesson were articulated and discussed. Consequently, across all classrooms, the high levels of extensions and scaffolds provided all students with appropriate challenging tasks to develop higher order thinking skills as evidenced in student work products and discussions.
- Teachers gather and analyze data from common assessments that aligns with the school’s curricula, provide students with targeted feedback, and refine instructional decisions to improve learning outcomes. (2.2)
  - A wide range of assessments, including pre- and post-tests in English language arts and math, teacher created tests, CCLS aligned tasks, rubrics, student reflection journals, exit slips, and Fountas and Pinnell reading levels are used to drive discussions on student achievement and areas of need. In addition, grade teams use this information to identify gaps in student learning and develop action plans to address students’ learning needs. Furthermore, ongoing assessments are also used to create flexible groupings, adjustments in assignments, and provide targeted resources such as manipulatives and math boards to engage students in appropriate learning activities. For example, upon examination of fourth grade student writing, teachers made adjustments to their instruction as they identified that students needed additional support in developing their topic sentence and use of text-based evidence to formulate a more compelling argument. Other instructional adjustments incorporated modeling, peer-conferences, checklists and student feedback during conferences with teachers. Across classrooms, student work products demonstrated feedback from teachers related to strengths as well as areas in need of improvement. In addition, students are able to clearly articulate their next learning steps using the feedback provided from their teachers and peers, thus meeting their learning goals. For example, a student shared that conferences with the teacher directly linked to the task rubric helped to support their next work product, and provided additional details and examples which led to improved score on their next task. As a result, teachers’ assessment analyses afford opportunities to make timely adjustments to curricula and instruction to target students at different levels as evidenced by student work and classroom observations.

- School leaders use data from ongoing classroom observations and the Danielson Framework for Teaching to provide meaningful feedback resulting in improved teacher practice. (4.1)
  - The school leader communicates clear expectations for an instructional approach that is student centered and embeds higher order questions to enhance deep discussions and thinking. Leadership conducts frequent cycles of observation and provides immediate, actionable feedback with detailed next steps. Data from observations is continuously analyzed to understand instructional areas of strength and growth, and develop professional development opportunities to support teachers' growth. As a result of the observations, the administration included additional support such as instructional walkthroughs to further assist teachers in making connections between individual student needs and the CCLS. For example, in an instructional walkthrough the school focused on the following question: "What strategies are being used to promote student to student discussions?" Feedback and next steps included the use of various levels of questioning based on the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) matrix, meaningful planning discussions supported by text-based evidence, and student led discussions using protocols to delineate their roles and expectations. Moreover, teachers are also provided with opportunities to join instructional walkthroughs to hone in their instructional practice and develop a consistent pedagogical lens across the school. Teachers commented that this experience helped them "to develop a clearer vision of what is needed to advance our school", and gave them "opportunities to both observe best practices of several of my colleagues and reflect upon my own practices." Teachers also shared that "targeted feedback and strong support for professional growth is moving the entire school toward attaining their overall goals." Consequently, school-wide instructional practices have shown improvement as evidenced of tracking tools that measure competency ratings for individual teachers over time.

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

- Strengthen efforts to strategically foster high expectations and communication among staff, parents, and students to develop a cohesive understanding for learning and preparation for the next level. (3.4)
  - The administration articulates high expectations for all members of the school faculty and staff through regular faculty conferences, various communications, and individual and team discussions to establish a culture for learning. Professional development for all members of the school community sets the level of work expected to support the school's expectations. Furthermore, the school began the year by offering professional development on the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE), including Measurement of Student Learning (MOSL), and the Danielson Framework to develop a common language describing the characteristics of highly effective instruction. For instance, supervisors established structures for teachers to reflect on the Danielson Framework to focus the lens of classroom observations, and developed additional professional development opportunities to ensure accountability for those expectations. In addition, the school consistently communicates and supports high expectations for students through ongoing feedback and places a high priority on effective communication with families. Respectively, school leaders, teachers, students, and families create a true partnership in holding every student to high standards and ensure that each student has a clear path toward achieving their learning goals. Moreover, during the student meeting, students shared that for every project they are provided with ideas from their

conferences with teachers and that feedback from peers and rubrics to help them improve their work. Furthermore, the school administration also collaborates in creating additional opportunities for family engagement that includes CCLS workshops, emails and phone calls, report cards and progress reports to inform parents of their children's academic progress and provide strategies to support their learning at home. Although this communication enables parents to provide support at home, based on conversations with parents, next steps are often general and do not provide targeted information and strategies for specific academic needs. As a result, parents shared that the school is limited in providing detailed feedback to families regarding academic achievement, thus hindering progress towards expectations and strategic collaboration to prepare students for the next level.

- Deepen the work of teacher teams to ensure systematic analysis of inquiry work and instructional practice to increase progress for all learners. (4.2)
  - Teacher teams meet frequently for a variety of purposes to adjust units of study, develop and revise rubrics and assessments, and analyze student work to further meet the needs of students. Moreover, the work of teacher teams is concentrated on inquiry to strategize and develop additional supports for students who are in need of targeted academic interventions. Teachers shared that instructional strategies deduced in the teacher meeting include the use of peer support, specific use of modeling strategies as a scaffold to increase access to learning tasks, and graphic organizers to support students' learning needs and styles. For example, each team created an action plan to improve learning for their grade by integrating focused goals, specific source of data for analysis, identification of targeted resources, and benchmarks to measure and monitor improvement. However, in the teacher meeting observed, teachers did not use facilitation techniques or protocols for looking at data and student work to assist their discussions in developing strategic next steps, sharing instructional practices, or identifying academic interventions. Consequently, these practices limit discussions and analysis of student data and work to ensure even higher potential of increasing academic progress for all students.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Mill Basin	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>				
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations?			<b>X</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
<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>