

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

P.S. 245

K245

**249 East 17th Street
Brooklyn
NY 11226**

Principal: Erica Williams

Dates of review: March 25-26, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Dr. Rhonda Dawn Farkas

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

PS 245 is an elementary school with 298 students from pre-k through grade 5. The school population comprises 59% Black, 36% Hispanic, 3% White, 1% Asian, and 1% other students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 95.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Curricula and strategic academic tasks across grades and subject areas are aligned to State standards and instructional shifts, with refined supports and extensions to ensure that all learners are engaged in high quality learning. (1.1)
 - The school uses multiple resources from Engage NY, the Common Core library, and Generation Ready for K-5 in English language arts (ELA). Through the support of a consultant, teachers have created their own units to integrate the instructional shifts and ensure students meet the rigorous demands of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Instructional units include embedded academic tasks and vocabulary that highlight consistent rigor to deepen student thinking for all learners, including English language learners (ELLs), Students with disabilities (SWDs), and accelerated learners. In grade one for example, the literacy unit, which supports text based writing in informational and literary texts, includes Tier 2 vocabulary, such as *persuasive* and *opinion*. In math, the school is using *EnVisions* for kindergarten through grade two and *Go Math* for grades three to five. This year, teachers created new math curriculum maps, which are now more comprehensive and CCLS-aligned. The curriculum includes unit vocabulary, formative and summative assessments, scaffolds, and extensions. It also encompasses big ideas and essential questions, such as, “*How can you use models to show equivalent fractions?*” and “*How can you use the strategy ‘make a table’ to solve problems using equivalent fractions?*” In addition to these components, curriculum maps also contain mini-lessons, performance tasks, suggestions for implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to support refining curricular tasks with appropriate scaffolds for a variety of learners, as well as technology resources, such as *Brain Pop* and *Study Island* to support cognitive engagement. To ensure coherence across the school, all teachers use *Snap Math* and *Spatial-Temporal (ST) Math*, a game-based instructional software designed to boost math comprehension and proficiency through interactive learning experiences, replete with graphically-rich animations that visually represent mathematical concepts to improve conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills for a diversity of learners. The school’s push-in model for the Teacher of English as a Second Language (TESOL) and the teacher of Special Education Support Services (SETSS) ensures that students receive necessary supports to keep them cognitively engaged during lessons, thus, ensuring that all students, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) have access to curricula. Across all curricular areas, as evidenced by the enhanced work products in portfolios across the school, students are citing relevant information and using multiple sources in their writing products that reflect teachers’ strategically planned units of study in ELA and math to push cognitive development and essential skills that position students on a track for college and career readiness.
- The principal strategically uses time and resources to effectively align with school goals that result in strengthened pedagogy, increased collaboration, and improved student work across the school. (1.3)
 - The principal’s decision to provide five common periods per month for teachers to collaborate with their grade-level constituents is well aligned to

the school's instructional goals, one of which is to develop curriculum maps across content areas that are aligned to the CCLS, include the instructional shifts, and promote higher order thinking skills. Every Wednesday, teachers on a grade meet to share best practices, collaborate on planning lessons, and analyze student work products and data sources from assessments using specific structures, such as the Tuning Protocol, to assist with their analysis. Additionally, the principal purchased the services of a literacy consultant for 20 days through Generation Ready to continue teachers' work on aligning units to the CCLS, revising curriculum maps to include a broader focus on information and opinion writing with varied sources, including web-based newspaper articles, and tailoring lesson plans for small group instruction. Teachers are also provided with professional development where teaching practices are modeled by the consultant to address the goal of developing their ability to plan student-centered strategies, such as taking a stance on information gathered from their research and convincing their partner of their opinion using text evidence, and to formulate questions that push students' thinking and engage them in rich class discussions with appropriate activities. To ensure the school's emphasis on informational writing through various sources, the principal has provided \$1200.00 to each classroom teacher to augment his or her classroom library, using 50% of the funding on informational texts. In addition, she has implemented a "Book of the Month" program, using books such as *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, *The Wednesday Surprise*, by Eve Bunting, and *One*, by Katherine Otosji. Each of these books, focused on character education, is supplemented by professional development in which teachers collaboratively develop high order level 3 and 4 questions using Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) framework, as well as Hess' Cognitive Matrix, as resources. Furthermore, the purposeful decision of the principal to employ a push-in model by the SETSS teacher and TESOL has enabled teachers across the school to become articulate in designing lessons that cognitively engage students in challenging academic tasks. Teachers are cultivating their practice and are more cognizant of ways to meet students' at their respective points of entry, as evident in the displays of high level student work products across the school and the improved outcomes towards meeting CCLS grade-level specific targets. As a result of this focus on ensuring coherence and CCLS-alignment, 90%, 80%, 81%, 77%, 90%, and 81% of students have made progress in kindergarten through grade 5, respectively, according to the Fountas and Pinnell reading benchmarks.

- The principal and faculty maintain a favorable and inclusive school culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that supports the academic and personal development of students and adults. (1.4)
 - The Principal has launched a student government, comprised of six students in grades 3-5, who were elected by their peers. These students have developed their own motto for the school, which is "Making the School a Better Place, One Step at a Time." They surveyed their peers and have launched initiatives following their analysis of the surveys collected. One such initiative was to have a school-wide fundraising activity for the victims of the typhoon in the Philippines. These students, with the support of the principal, subsequently created a letter that was disseminated to the families requesting donations towards this cause. This student-led collaborative effort resulted in the contribution of \$450.00. The student government then researched various agencies to which they could donate the funds and have

since become partners with the US Aid from the American People to the Philippines to provide humanitarian assistance in the wake of the recent natural disaster. This activity underscores the infusion of meaningful student involvement throughout the life of the school, as evidenced by student leadership, responsibility, and voice in school-wide decision making, such as tackling global challenges, and attention to social-emotional learning by showing understanding and empathy for others. The school's belief system of high expectations and a positive learning environment for all is extended through their *Family as Learners* program, where parents are invited to participate in classroom learning experiences with their children, as well as their special monthly assembly programs to honor the 'Students of the Month' and those who earn citizenship awards for demonstrating positive attitudes toward their classmates, school, and community. The school also has a cross-age mentoring program, which involves third and fifth grade students serving as reading buddies for kindergarten and first grade students on Friday mornings, for the purpose of actively guiding and supporting their younger peers in academic as well as personal development. Additionally, the school hosts workshops for students and staff, such as *Take a Stand, Lend a Hand*, to propel their crusade against bullying, which has led to students reporting that they feel very safe and secure at school. Similarly, one parent professed, "It's a small school but a lot of good things are going on here--social skills as well as education." As a result of these conscientious efforts, students and families have a positive attitude toward school and student attendance has been maintained at an unwavering rate of 95%.

- The principal effectively uses the Danielson Framework to bolster teacher development with actionable feedback and professional development that results in enhanced pedagogy and improved student learning outcomes. (4.1)
 - The principal generated a calendar of observations for the year, based on teachers' Initial Planning Conference (IPC) options, and to date, she has already completed her third round of classroom visits. Through her analysis of observation data, she has determined that questioning and discussion techniques, component 3B on the Danielson Framework, are areas in need of further teacher development. As a result, she has established a professional development blueprint, replete with dates, common planning periods, goals, and outcomes. She also uses evidence from her observations, including student work products, to support teacher performance at all levels and ensure effective corrective action and follow-up. Based on the particular needs of the teachers, the principal has arranged for school wide and customized professional development, such as modeling and co-teaching lessons, as well as enlisting the aid of the Network's Achievement Coach or the school's Generation Ready consultant to model lessons and coach teachers individually or in grade-level groups. A member of one of the teacher teams expressed, "The principal provides a lot of professional development, particularly in questioning; we generate questions based on level 3 and 4 DOK." Another teacher affirmed, "I think about my questions more strategically--questions that get the kids to think more!" In addition to maximizing use of the technology tools available in ADVANCE to track her observation data, the principal crafts detailed observation reports that contain explicit, actionable feedback to teachers, which captures low inference evidence to move teachers toward their next steps. For example, "The questions posed during this observation required students to think

strategically. In order to promote learning through discussion, students should be expected to respond to each other's ideas and statements. During this time, your role is to facilitate the discussions where the arrow of recitation should be between students. This can be achieved through turn and talks and active listening." As a result of the principal's deliberate focus on enhancing pedagogy across the school, teachers are progressing along the Danielson framework for teaching, as evidenced by 71% of teachers advancing by at least one level of effectiveness in component 3B, Questioning and Discussion Techniques, according to the principal's most recent observation data. Consequently, the principal's high-leverage strategies for identifying teachers on the trajectory of effectiveness, supporting pedagogical growth through explicit goals and next steps, engaging in reflective feedback conversations around teaching and learning, and aligning professional development have resulted in improved adult and student learning outcomes.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure consistency of strategic questioning and discussion techniques as well as the use of scaffolds and extensions across the school to ensure access to curricula and cognitive engagement for all learners. (1.2)
 - Across classrooms, instruction is aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and teachers endorse the school wide belief in the workshop model, as evidenced by their lessons that impart the gradual release of responsibility through guided and independent practice. In some classrooms, teachers asked robust questions that invited students to speculate to ensure students' exploration of essential ideas at levels that build on their prior knowledge and prompt continued growth. For example, in a fifth grade math class, the students were provided opportunities to work in data based groups to draw upon their prior knowledge of problem solving strategies to choose among three charts during a "gallery walk" to solve fraction word problems of varied degrees of complexity, such as multi-step word problems involving mixed numbers for a group of advanced learners. Each group had a recorder and reporter as the participants collaboratively solved the problems. The teacher provided a balance between teacher-assigned and student-selected tasks by having the student groups select three of the nine problems depicted on charts while she circulated about the room, gathering data from observing and assessing students' interactions and work products, and clarifying or extending student thinking by asking advancing questions. Similarly, in a second grade class, the children were working on gathering important information on selected topics using two or more books. The teacher provided students with varied graphic organizers, such as a Venn diagram and a two-column note-taking graphic organizer to scaffold their work. This teacher also asked probing questions such as, "Where did you get your information?" "What source did you use?" In these two classrooms, the teachers spent time with at least one group to guide them in their exploration. However, although teachers across the school incorporate UDL strategies, in many classrooms, questions were either leading, such as, "We know this is a _____," a question asked by a first grade teacher during a lesson on adding multiples of 10 to two-digit numbers, or encouraged one student at a time to respond to questions posed by the teacher, resulting in inconsistency of teachers providing suitable scaffolds and supports to meet students at their respective points of entry. Thus, opportunities to surface common

misunderstandings, assess student mastery of material, and provide differentiated strategies of engaging with content, specific to individual student needs, are missed.

- Expand teachers' ongoing use of checks for understanding and multiple sources of common student data to monitor student progress, adjust instructional strategies, to forge interventions in response to the needs of their students. (2.2)
 - All teacher teams use a wide assortment of common assessments, such as running records, conference notes, unit assessments, and embedded performance tasks to address students' specific learning needs, track progress, assess students' efficacy, and use the results to make adjustments into curricula and instruction at the team level. In some classrooms, teachers use a variety of "in the moment" strategies to maximize visibility of student thinking and to get a "pulse" of student understanding by asking students to rephrase material, conferencing with individual students, drawing upon peer conversations, having students respond on white boards, or scanning progress of students working independently or in groups. One example was in a third grade class, where the teacher added a student to her pre-planned strategy group in response to his exclamation, "I just do not get it." Although teachers are equipped with such knowledge, the practice of consistently or proactively adjusting their classroom instruction to maximize student participation in their own learning, modify use of instructional materials during lessons, or provide scaffolds and supports to ensure that the content was accessible to all learners, including the school's relevant subgroups was uneven across classrooms. Accordingly, this limits teachers in modifying ongoing classroom instruction, implementing immediate interventions when data points reveal deficiencies in learners' skills and knowledge, and crafting immediate and effective classroom adjustments to respond to misunderstandings.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: PS 245	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