

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Duke Ellington**

**Elementary School M004**

**500 West 160<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York  
NY 10032**

**Principal: Bonnie White Jones**

**Dates of review: October 21-22, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Holly Reichert**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Duke Ellington is an elementary school with 736 students from pre-K through grade 5. The school population comprises 9% Black and 91% Hispanic students. The student body includes 34% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 91.60%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school ensures curricula is aligned to the Common Core and makes purposeful decisions aimed at building instructional coherence across the school to promote college and career readiness for all students. (1.1)
  - The school adopted core curriculum materials, Ready Gen for English language arts and Go Math, to insure consistency of instruction and full alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards from kindergarten to grade 5. Additionally, the school selected common core aligned textbook programs for science and social studies. With these new instructional programs currently being implemented, the school's curricula provide uniform, coherent content across grades and subjects. Moreover, strategies embedded in these curricular programs emphasize rigorous habits and higher order skills aimed at college and career readiness focused on academic language, close reading, writing from sources, and critical thinking. The decision to adopt the new curricula resulted from conversations with the school community about how best to meet all student learning needs, address the new standards and increase student achievement. Teacher plans and units reviewed follow a delineated set of elements articulated by what is covered in the curricula and designed by the administration. Teachers regularly meet to collaboratively plan, look at student work, and discuss the new curricula on each grade and across grades to monitor coverage and coherence in delivery. Connected to the school's vision of student learning for kindergarten to grade 5 and in sync with the instructional shifts, all students are immersed in tasks that require academic word learning, active listening, critical thinking, 'accountable talk', using evidence from text in oral and written statements, and reading widely and deeply. Both parents and students stated that they like the new curricula because it requires explanations that answer what, how and why questions. One parent said, "I really like Ready Gen and Go Math. They go more in depth and require evidence, asking 'how do you know?'" To support the large Spanish bilingual population, the school augmented curricula with Spanish language translations of the literary and informational texts used in English. Furthermore, English language learners and students with disabilities in Integrated Co-Teaching classes receive the same rigorous curricula tailored for their needs and supported with additional vocabulary, grammar, reading and math programs. The school attributes 86% of the school's English Language learners increasing at least one proficiency level on the NYSESLAT in 2013 to the use of these supplemental materials last year.
- The school uses resources to support effective teacher practice, lesson planning and delivery of instruction so that the level of rigor and quality of supports is reflected in student work products. (1.3)
  - In alignment with the school's goals to support teacher practice, implement new curricula and support student achievement, the school made specific decisions about how to use available funds, its schedule, and staff. Scheduled time and allocated funding resources allow teams to work collaboratively during the school day and after school. Each grade

level and cluster team meet for a double period every week to look at student work and plan instruction. Moreover, the school created a Math Committee specifically to support the roll-out of Go Math and a Lead Teacher Team tasked to support vertical planning and coherence. In addition, lead teachers serve on the school's Curriculum Committee which makes key decisions regarding science and social studies. Teams visited stated that their work is essential to the successful implementation of the new curricula. Even though the new curricular materials arrived late, scheduled time and resources were used to make key decisions about what to teach and to support a smooth start of the school year with cohesiveness across grades. Displays of student work, completed during the first month of school, show that students engaged in appropriately challenging content that led to literacy work products showing thinking and connections to literature and famous people's lives. Students stated that they engage in reading, writing, and tasks that ask them to talk with their partners and find evidence in the text they are reading. To further support the bilingual program, the school purchased Spanish language translations of the materials used in English thus providing teachers will needed resources. Conjointly, and connected to the school's deep commitment to collaboration, administrators collaborate with and support the work of teams and teachers by grade bands. Therefore, to better support the lower grades, the school hired an additional assistant principal. Aimed at improving student achievement, teachers voted to shift extended day to the afternoon due to attendance issues in the morning. Teachers confirmed that attendance and student learning has improved as a result of this schedule change. Parents agreed that the school's decisions and use of resources focus on supporting the staff and students in the effective implementation of new curricula.

- The school provides actionable feedback to teachers aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the school's beliefs about how students learn best so defining and reinforcing expectations to promote teacher growth. (4.1)
  - Supporting teacher growth underpins the importance the school places on collaboration and clear expectations to foster learning. Calendared for the year, formal and informal classroom visits take place daily by individual administrators as well as collaboratively as a team to norm, to surface patterns across grades, and to see effective practice on different grades. Subsequently, administrators use a variety of written feedback templates matching the range of classroom visits conducted. Thus, united by the school's goal to improve teacher practice, classroom visits are frequent and varied in order to provide feedback and support as per specific elements of instruction and classroom practice. Walk-throughs focus on coherent lesson delivery and school-wide expectations, snapshots connect to specific Quality Review indicators, informal observations align evidence to the Danielson Framework competencies, and formal observation reports provide a narrative account with detailed commendations and recommendations. As a result, an assistant principal recently conducted an intra-visitation learning walk for her grade team to see effective Ready Gen lesson delivery in an upper grade classroom. In addition to classroom visits, administrators collect samples of student work for review and use an articulated template to provide specific artifact feedback. Hence, administration frequently reviews student journals across subject areas to provide teachers with detailed feedback on such elements as organization, academic rigor, consistent grading, and teacher feedback. The assistant principals stated that their

role couples coaching and supervision with feedback and support to teachers as the bulk of their work during the school day. Observation data determines school-wide professional development and specific coaching to teachers across grades and subjects. The administration shared that the support provided to teachers through coaching and professional development connects to what they see happening in classrooms and on which they provide feedback and next steps. Review of written feedback from spring 2013 through October 2013 shows growth in questioning/discussion and student engagement as well as adherence to school-wide practices which are focus areas for the school.

- The majority of teachers participate in teacher teams that meet weekly to share best practices and look at student work/data in order to adjust instructional plans aimed at addressing diverse learner needs. (4.2)
  - Teacher teams meet weekly to discuss student work and plan instruction. During their common double-period, teacher teams follow a common, articulated agenda to review student work and determine next steps as well as plan for all subjects. The lead teacher on the grade facilitates and records agreed upon findings, next steps, and the detailed lesson plan information for all content. Teachers have access to team meetings notes, which are electronically captured and maintained in a binder for reference. During team meetings observed, teachers shared that they have only recently implemented new Common Core Standards aligned curricula and one area they adjusted is pacing, lengthening lessons by two to three days. Thus, in order to address student needs, teachers lengthen lesson delivery in order to provide background and cover content deeply. Focused on supporting the specific needs of the lowest third of students, teams review data and student work samples to plan for guided, small group support and other interventions. Teams plan what to reteach and share data tracking of skills to monitor progress. Moreover, teachers stated that they learn from their colleagues and utilize shared practices. One teacher stated that following a colleague's presentation of student work with labeling, she implemented picture labeling with her bilingual students which led to greater word retention. Using guided groups to support student learning is part of the school's instructional culture, and teams discussed how to best differentiate the new curricula. Such consistent effort on the part of teacher teams results in increased capacity to implement common core curricula and meet the needs of diverse learners.

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

- Increase teacher capacity to deliver instruction that provides access and cognitively rigorous tasks so that all learners are actively engaged and produce quality work products. (1.2)
  - The school focuses on specific, common instructional practices to provide multiple entry points connected to its beliefs about how students learn best, including: modeling; visual anchors, such as reference charts and the use of technology; active listening and engagement with turn and talk were partners paraphrase what the other said; and the use of questioning to promote critical thinking. Teachers are expected to use these strategies to engage all students, especially English language learners, students with disabilities, and struggling students. However, many of

these common instructional practices were not consistently observed across classrooms. Some teachers conferred with students during independent practice and used visuals from the mini-lesson as reference points when supporting students. Some teachers provided a model and visual supports, used the turn and talk strategy, and asked a range of questions followed by students working in table teams on the same task. While in other classes, models, visual supports and turn and talk were not used. Even though a couple classrooms visited used partner turn and talk followed by a whole-class share that focused on what one's partner stated, this practice was not observed across classrooms. In a few classrooms observed, students struggled to work independently and with their partners. Students questioned about their work stated that they were not sure what to do, how to do the work, and how to get help. In the few classrooms, where these practices were fully executed, students engaged with the content as planned and work samples showed thinking and understanding of the content. Thus, the lack of consistency in the delivery of these common practices to engage and provide access for all students hinders instructional coherence across classrooms as evidenced by uneven levels of student understanding in oral and written work products.

- Ensure the consistent use of on-going and common assessment practices aligned with the school's curricula so that all teachers make appropriate adjustments to effectively address all learner needs. (2.2)
  - The school uses common assessments and rubrics from the new curricula as well as teacher-created assessments and classroom practices such as conferencing, guided groupings, questioning and global checks for understanding. Whole class questioning and on-going checks for understanding observed included whole class hands-up, thumbs up or other oral or visual signal. Coupled with a school-wide grading policy and student data tracking binders, teachers monitor student progress towards learning goals. Across the school, reading logs and running records are used to track reading frequency, amount of reading, fiction and nonfiction text selections, and growth in reading. Teachers regularly use data to identify learning needs to specifically support struggling students. Moreover, teachers plan guided groups using data from collected student work and conferencing notes. During classes observed, teachers circulated during independent and small group work to conference with and coach students; additionally, some teachers pulled small groups for additional support. The administration and teachers acknowledged that they are working hard to ensure that they implement the new assessments with fidelity in order to accurately form guided groups that address student learning needs. With the use of existing assessments during the first month of school, teachers provided students and families with feedback and next steps. Aware that the new curricula and assessments sequence skills and content differently, teachers are carefully considering the implications gleaned from the analysis of student work and how to make suitable adjustments to the new curricula. While the school has clear common assessment processes in place, the transition to the new curricula and assessments has surfaced new challenges in accurately identifying learning gaps and making appropriate adjustments to instruction, thus limiting timely support for struggling students. During this initial transition to new curricula and assessments, the school is working hard to effectively and efficiently address all learning needs.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

| School name:  | 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> |