



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Quality Review
Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning
2013-2014**

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Samuel Stern School

M007

**160 East 120 Street
Manhattan
NY 10035**

Principal: Sameer Talati

Dates of review: December 4 - 5, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Alexandra Estrella

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Samuel Stern School is a K-8 school with 402 students from Pre-Kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 28% Black, 64% Hispanic, 3% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 11% 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 91.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school utilizes resources and aligns teacher professional responsibilities to provide interventions that meet the school's instructional goals and increase student achievement. (1.3)
 - The school leader makes strategic organizational decisions intended to meet school wide goals and improve student learning. At the end of last year, the school leadership conducted a survey to determine areas of focus for the new academic year and found that teachers needed additional support in implementing the instructional shifts and Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). As a result, this year the principal hired Literacy and Math coaches to support teachers in adapting the new CCLS aligned curricula and instructional shifts. Also, to ensure that teachers continuously modify curricula to meet the diverse needs of students and assess student progress, the leadership team partnered with Teachers College and Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI). Additionally, to increase student academic achievement the school has partnered with "I Have a Dream" Foundation to support students with their homework and academic areas. As a result of these partnerships the school curriculum has been aligned to CCLS and modified to meet student's diverse needs as evidenced by the modified Pre-K to 8 curriculum maps and increased student achievement as captured in the school's grade level data charts.
 - Staff time is strategically structured such that teams consistently meet to look at student work and improve instructional practices to ensure student achievement. The grade level teams meet twice a week to look at student work and modify units of study and/or lessons as observed during the second grade team meeting. Also, each content inquiry team and vertical inquiry team meets on a monthly basis to look at school wide data organized by individuals, class, and grade level. This was evidenced by a differentiated yet rigorous math task assigned to students in the math classroom, where they had to solve, explain, and design problems based on the concepts they were learning. The grade team meeting utilizes these findings to modify, scaffold, and adjust instruction to meet student's diverse needs through rigors task.
- The administrative team effectively uses the information gathered from frequent observations of lessons and reflection on student work to support professional growth that improves teaching and learning. (4.1)
 - School leaders in collaboration with teacher team leaders and coaches support the development of all teachers with effective feedback by utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes. Additionally, the administrative team utilizes Teacher Booth to track the school's cycles of observation, and identify areas that individual and groups of teachers need for targeted professional development. This tool is also utilized to communicate with groups and individual teachers to support them with their areas of professional growth. In the beginning of the year teachers are asked to set four long-term goals prior to their planning conference with the principal. In the

meeting, the principal works with the teachers to make sure goals align with the teacher's needs as well as the needs of the students they are serving. Also, the meeting is used to set short-term goals, develop action plans and keep teacher moral high while they work through their long-term goals. As evident in several samples of teacher observations, the leadership team provides actionable feedback to teachers that is carefully monitored and refined through subsequent informal or formal observations. Most of the teacher observations reports reviewed showed how the feedback provided to individual teachers was aligned to their yearlong goals and clearly provided scaffolded next steps to improve their pedagogy. Consequently, teachers regardless of their level of experience are on track to reach their goals by the end of the academic school year; thereby, increasing student achievement as evident by students' work products.

- All teachers are engaged in professional collaborations strengthening their instructional capacity and empowering them to assume leadership roles that directly impact key decisions across the school. (4.2)
 - Teacher teams lead by a coach or lead teacher engage in collaborative inquiry by looking at student work samples and determining next steps to support students in meeting their goals and strengthen teacher practice. The teams are organized by grade, vertical-content, and lower and upper grade inquiry teams. The grade level teams meet at least twice a week to look at student work samples and data trends to revise and adjust the curriculum. They also use protocols like the "Revised Tuning Protocol" to look at student work and determine what next steps teachers should take to support struggling students. This was evidenced in agendas, notes (Evernote) and the revised unit plan from the 4th grade meeting that took place on October 17, 2013 as teachers planned for their 2nd unit that began on October 29, 2013. During student work analysis, teachers found that the majority of students were not distinguishing relevant evidence in their writing. Thus, the teachers strategically chose to focus on CCLS W4.1b and W4.2 to address this weakness. In 7th grade mathematics, teachers realized that there was a lack of structure in student written response. This led to the revision of the way teachers wrote the extended response tasks in addition to the creation of anchor charts in middle school classrooms to guide students' extended responses. Also, during the vertical math team meeting, the team looked at an array of work samples ranging from novice to highly proficient to identify areas the team or whole school needed to focus on to build students' ability to formulate a mathematical argument. The team found that several of the work samples lacked evidence to support claims made to prove that their computation was correct. As a result, the team decided to build into the next unit; writing mathematical arguments using evidence from the computations made and referencing those results. They also elicited the support of the literacy and science team so that students understood that writing an argument was not something only happening in mathematics, instead it is happening in all content areas. Coaches as well as teachers within the team are given the leadership opportunity to make and adjust curriculum and to decide on key instructional adjustments that affect student learning across the school.

- Strengthen teacher assessment practices to include meaningful feedback and reflect varied use of ongoing checks for understanding during lesson delivery so that all students demonstrate increased mastery. (2.2)
 - School leaders and teachers utilize curricula aligned assessments to support curricular and instructional adjustments in order to increase student mastery. The school has a yearlong assessment calendar that outlines unit by unit the assessments that will take place within each grade. These assessments are utilized to determine what students already know and need to learn. With the data collected from pre/post unit assessments, teachers are able to modify the curricula to serve the needs of all students including special education students and English language learners (ELLs). For example, the 5th grade literacy unit was modified to include strategies that would support students to think about symbolism and synthesized text to look for hidden issues, since the pre-assessment and running records revealed that several students struggled in this area. Consequently, students showed significant improvements in their post assessment. Disaggregated data from common assessments is tracked on skill target sheets. This data drives unit modification and lesson development to meet school wide, classroom, ELLs, special education students, and individual student goals.
 - Teachers, across grade and content areas provide students with clear next steps for how they can improve their performance. For example, in 5th grade, students were assigned a writing task that asked: Was Andrew Jackson a friend of the Cherokees? A sample first draft showed that the teacher highlighted the word “friend” and asked, "Does the repetition of the word 'friend' mean that Andrew Jackson actually thought of the Cherokee's as friends?" In the second draft, the student supported his opinion with evidence that reflected the meaning of the word "friend" when he wrote, "One reason that Andrew Jackson said, 'You can commence your career of improvement and prosperity'. This shows that you can make a better living if you move there," expanding on his original idea of friendship. In 7th grade mathematics, one student was writing her response before solving the problem, leading to an incorrect answer. The teacher worked with the student in developing clear steps to answer word problems, for example, read the question, highlight important details from the question that will allow you to answer the problem, solve the problem, then in writing explain the reason behind your solution. After receiving feedback, the student was able to apply her knowledge in mathematics and then complete a written explanation. As a result, of the constant feedback provided to students that were scoring levels one and two in the mathematics rubric during the beginning of the year have moved to levels two, three, and four; thereby showing improvement in their ability to achieve learning objectives.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and emphasize key content standards in the units so that all students are cognitively engaged. (1.1)
 - In collaboration with the teaching staff, school leaders are in the process of purposefully aligning key standards and integrating CCLS units of study that emphasize rigorous habits that promote college and career

readiness for all students. As observed in the 2nd grade literacy team meeting teachers were reviewing student work and discussing CCLS unit modifications and adjustments to support the diverse learning needs of the 2nd grade students. For example, students were struggling with reading informational text because they needed more support with first grade standards; therefore, teachers revised the unit of study to infuse both first and second grade standards. They also infused the use of visuals to support students in the writing process. The team also addressed strategies that helped special education students meet their learning needs by embedding small group instruction, one-on-one support, and differentiated tasks for ELLs and special education students in the unit plan. In an effort to promote college and career readiness, the school has the same expectations for all students, but provides differentiated entry points to the work. For example, in a 5th grade social studies class, students utilized differentiated text based on their independent reading levels, but the end task for all students was the same. In a 4th and 6th grade mathematics class, students were given the same task with scaffolded steps or the use of manipulatives to help them solve different problems. Also, in the 2nd grade literacy, students were able to utilize images to help them discuss or describe their ideas. These modifications are not only embedded in the day-to-day lesson plans, but also the overall unit of study as evidenced by literacy and mathematics unit samples. The literacy samples in all grades had modifications made to scaffold tasks to meet the needs of the lowest third and provided independent Depth of Knowledge level 4 tasks. Hence, across grades and subject areas, planning documents showed a coherent commitment to embed literacy standards focused on providing evidence to support an argument, as well as engagement in academic dialogue utilizing textual evidence; thereby developing rigorous habits and higher order skills for all students, preparing them for college and careers.

- Strengthen teachers' practice to strategically provide multiple entry points into appropriately challenging tasks and high levels of discussion for all learners to demonstrate their thinking. (1.2)
 - The common belief that students learn best when they have to construct their own meaning and personal goals, and take responsibility for their learning is consistently practiced throughout the school. All classes apply the workshop model for every lesson focusing the students on the learning objective but giving them a substantial amount of time to practice what they have learned. Teachers are aware of and apply the expectations of the school's framework for teacher practice and the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) matrix; however the level of questioning across classrooms was inconsistent. In one class the students were engaged in five different discussions about the Western Expansion: one group of students who needed additional support were discussing how they could utilize different vocabulary from a content specific word list; another group was discussing what additional details they could add to their chapter; the high level group was analyzing different events that took place during the era they were studying. Yet, in another class, students were continuing their work comparing bits and pieces of chewy fruit worms as a way to build understanding around ratios, but not all students were supported in developing their wonderings or responses. Math lessons incorporated high-level problems with real world applications but many students struggled with computation or with explaining their process. Teachers

strategically grouped the students and provided small group lessons to support ELLs, special education students and struggling students and broke down the problems to help students understand the process for problem solving. Teachers noted that some students need additional support and practice to reach mastery. Thus, the lack of clearly planned next steps and scaffolds to support learning did not consistently offer all students the opportunity to demonstrate their learning and exhibit their thinking through deep discussions and high quality work products.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Samuel Stern School (04M007)	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