



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Quality Review
Office of School Quality
Division of Academics, Performance, and Support
2013-2014**

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

River East Middle School

Middle School 037

**508 East 120th Street
Manhattan
NY 10035**

Principal: Rob Catlin

Dates of review: November 11-12, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Alexandra Estrella

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

River East is an elementary school with 215 students from Kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 47% Black, 49% Hispanic, 2% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 14% 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 94.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Focused school level goals are collaboratively developed by the school community, resulting in clear expectations for student achievement and social-emotional growth. (3.1)
 - School level goals in the areas of literacy and mathematics are continuously assessed and tracked for progress to accelerate student learning. All of the school's instructional Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) goals, as well as their school-wide inquiry work, relate back to student independence. Last year, the school focused heavily on incorporating student voice and independence into their project-based units and this year their goal is to transfer that work to all subjects. The intended outcome of this focus on student independence this year is to see student skill and understanding carry over from lesson-to-lesson, day-to-day, subject-to-subject and grade-to-grade. This is a result of last year's data, which showed that their students were passing assessments within a unit, but not carrying the learning into the next unit or a different content. As a result, the school decided not to focus on fact fluency in math, but applying those facts in other contexts. In literacy the school's goal is for student to write about reading and monitor how they are developing as readers independently. The school uses Fountas and Pinnell to assess student's reading levels and identify school-wide inquiry goals. For example, teachers' analysis of student miscues during running record assessments revealed that self-monitoring is the skill that prevented students from progressing further in reading. As a result, the school refined their goal to address this area of growth to support students in moving between levels. The Vertical Planning Literacy/Math Team, the inquiry team, as well as the Data Specialist team, monitor and reassess grade level and school-wide trends in reading, writing, and math data throughout the year on a weekly basis to assess the impact the work is having on student achievement. The goals as well as the manner in which they are constantly monitored and reassessed result in accelerated student learning and social emotional growth.
 - School leaders set forth a plan of action to ensure that representatives of staff, students and families actively participate in decision making to bring about school improvement. Recently, the School Leadership Team (SLT) engaged in active dialogue around providing multiple sources of effective communication given the various constituencies. For instance, parents voiced the need to receive school-wide communication via e-mail, advertisement, and texts. Consequently, the school established communication with parents utilizing these various media sources. Furthermore, a second conversation addressed parent's need to learn how to best support their children with the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) shift. Subsequently, the school offered workshops to train parents on how best to support their children with the new CCLS curricula. In collaboration with teachers, school leaders established a structure of support and communication through grade level and school wide-teams that foster dialogue that allows teachers to continuously establish and refine classroom, grade level or school wide goals. As a

result, school leaders effectively communicate school level goals and action plans that yield positive student achievement.

- School leaders and teachers communicate high expectations to the school community by providing clear supports to advance student progress and raise levels of success. (3.4)
 - School leaders have established an environment that consistently communicates high expectations to the entire staff and creates a professional culture of mutual accountability. The principal and assistant principal are prioritizing a push for more student independence by messaging their expectations in teacher team meetings and through focused individual feedback. This focus on student independence is aligned to Danielson Domain 3, component 3c - Engaging Students in Learning. The ELA vertical team was observed discussing the challenges students had with self-correcting which hinders their ability to read high level text independently. Each grade team leader within the vertical team then reports strategies and next steps to their grade team so that modifications to instructional practices can be made. As a result of this structure, teachers own the high expectations set out by school leadership so that students continue to work towards independence.
 - School leaders and staff effectively communicate “Habits of Mind” expectations in town hall meetings and in all classrooms fostering the mindset needed to be college and career ready. Also, school leaders efficaciously partner with families to support student progress toward those expectations by providing parents with CCLS aligned narrative report cards that contain language for behaviors associated with “Habits of Mind”. In addition, parents participate in town hall, which in turn prepare scholars and their families for college and career. Town Hall serves as a venue for students to discuss and learn about the different habits of mind and honor those students that live up to the expectations set by the habits. Consequently, scholars hold each other accountable and take ownership of their behaviors and actions rather than placing the onus only on the adults within the school community.
- All teachers regularly engage in professional collaborations that provide opportunities for shared leadership, as well as strengthen instructional capacity resulting in increased student achievement. (4.2)
 - All teachers are engaged in structured inquiry-based professional collaborations. The teams are organized by grade level, vertical literacy, vertical math, and inquiry. Grade level teams meet at least twice a week and look at student work samples to inform instructional next steps. The grade team leaders report trends to the vertical math and literacy team to determine if there are any school-wide trends for improvement. Once an area of growth is determined, the vertical teams set school-wide expectations on how to address it, and then the grade team leaders share the expectations and next steps with their team. Grade teams then develop action plans to infuse interventions into their day-to-day instruction to address the area of growth. For example, during the vertical ELA team meeting, teachers discussed that students were not self-correcting when reading; thereby, preventing them from increasing Fountas and Pinnell reading levels. As a result, teachers setup

classroom interventions to help students self-correct when they read. For instance, in first grade, teachers planned to provide students with strategies that would help them identify and tackle words they don't know and second grade teachers re-designed their lessons to include mini-lessons that studied sentence structures as well as exposed them to one hundred common phrases used in the English language. Moreover, students that continue to struggle despite the new interventions are brought up during the Response to Intervention (RTI) team meeting to design individualized student support plans resulting in improvement in students' academic achievement. Such teacher team practices have strengthened teachers' instructional capacity, resulting in school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners.

- All vertical teams are lead by teachers who contain valued knowledge in their grade or content area. This distributed leadership structure is embedded so that there is collegial leadership throughout the school and teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school. For example, based on last year's end of year survey teachers determined that a vertical team had to be established within the school to look at school-wide practices and as a result this year the school established the team that is lead by teacher leaders. Additionally, all teachers participate in planning meetings that give them the opportunity to reflect on school-wide and individual practices and provide leadership with feedback regarding what supports they need to develop and implement new programs, standards, or techniques. They also complete surveys that provide additional input to the administration. For instance, the staff felt they needed more frequent professional develop in literacy and as a result this year they have two Teachers College (TC) workshop days per teacher, ten for the administration, two teachers designated as "Lead Teachers" and one teacher signed up for a literacy "Specialty Group." In addition each grade is receiving ten in-house PD days from a TC staff developer. School leaders distribute leadership so that teachers are empowered to playing an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school resulting in increased student achievement.
- Across classrooms, teachers use assessment practices to adjust instruction and provide actionable feedback to meet learner needs and increase achievement. (2.2)
 - A variety of assessments aligned to the curricula are used to inform instructional practices. Vertical and grade teams examine formative and summative data from spreadsheets that are organized by grade, content area, significant subgroups of ELLs and SWD, and skills assessed. This allows teams to disaggregate and easily identify strengths and areas of needs for all students. The ongoing and consistent analysis of key formative assessment data including Fountas and Pinnell reading level assessments, student writing samples, student conference notes, and pre/post unit assessment data allow the school to gather a clear picture of student achievement trends for making strategic instructional decisions that increase student outcomes. For example, the second grade team analyzed a pre-assessment narrative writing piece and found that most students were struggling with organization. Students received individualized written and verbal actionable feedback from the teachers

through one-on-one conferencing and post-it notes. This was also evident during the student meeting when all students stated that teachers provide them with feedback and the student work samples had post-it notes with actionable feedback attached. The identification of skills that need to be re-visited along with targeted student feedback resulted in increased student achievement.

- Teachers keep track of student performance using a variety of assessments, rubrics, progress reports, narrative report cards, the school's grading policy, and standardized test data. For example, after the third grade team analyzed the results of pre-assessments, they decided to group students according to areas of growth to provide targeted instruction for the identified needs of those students. The teachers grouped students into three groups based on the trends noted in their work. A third of the group needed support in visualizing and double checking word problems. The other third needed support learning their multiplication fact, since most of them were utilizing repeated addition, and the final group needed to work on showing their work as well as all the steps they took in solving the problem. Consequently, each teacher in the team targeted a different group and supported them in the different areas they needed to further develop. As a result of these instructional adjustments based on assessment data, students demonstrated increased proficiency in the targeted areas.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills so that all students have access and are cognitively engaged. (1.1)
 - Rigorous habits and higher order skills were not evident in all classroom lesson plans. For example, the 4th grade social studies lesson plan outlined in detail how students were researching and learning about the Iroquois by working in different stations on a day-by-day rotating basis. It also identified how students would engage in close readings as well as the viewing of documentaries and reflection on them. In addition, scaffolded writing prompts were evident in all workstations outlined in the plan. However, the 5th grade mathematics lesson focused on computation without a clearly outlining the purpose and pushing students to apply the skill to more complex mathematical ideas or tasks. Even though the school's report card ranking is in the seventy-eight percentile, instructional shifts are becoming coherently integrated across the majority of classrooms resulting in all students being well prepared for upper grades.
 - The school monitors and adjusts its curricula using assessment results and current work products. For example, after a staff training where data showed that students needed to improve in their reading fluency, third grade teachers developed and implemented fluency focused lessons. The school has collaboratively planned purposeful ways to emphasize and integrate CCLS, scaffolding considerations for SWDs and ELLs and curricula modifications that infuse the habits of mind and further develop student independence. However, such curricular revision measures were

not evident as it pertains to high-achieving students. As a result, all students are not experiencing rigorous activities tailored to their needs.

- Ensure that instruction across classrooms strategically provides multiple entry points into the curricula to engage all learners in high levels of thinking and discussion, as well as increase student ownership of the learning. (1.2)
 - While the school universally strives to provide learners with multiple entry points and small group instruction in all content areas to support their core belief of building student independence, the instructional practices are not continuously modified to provide student choice and/or provide multi-layers of scaffolds. For example, four out of the eight classes observed didn't have differentiated tasks based on student levels or needs. A limited range of differentiation, inconsistent levels of questioning and assignments in five out of the eight classrooms observed that do not allow for multiple entry points for learning in some of the classrooms, result in missed opportunities for promoting high levels of student thinking in subject areas and some work products with uneven levels of rigor.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: River East Elementary School	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