

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

The STAR Academy - P.S.63

Elementary 01M063

**121 East 3 Street
Manhattan
NY 10009**

Principal: Darlene Cameron

Dates of review: February 26 - 27, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The STAR Academy - P.S.63 is an elementary school with 179 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 25% Black, 56% Hispanic, 10% White, and 7% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 29% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 92.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's embrace of Common Core Learning Standards ensures that its rigorous curriculum prepares all students for access to and success in middle school and beyond. (1.1)
 - All teachers integrate thoughtfully instructional shifts in curricular planning to balance nonfiction and fiction texts more evenly and to attain higher-order study and application of math. Faculty did not rush to adopt the recommended Core Curricula offerings last spring; instead, they reviewed vendor-created materials carefully, and elected to remain with Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) for English language arts, while developing their own math units of study and pacing calendar centered around multi-step problem-solving and investigations. Teachers consistently increase rigor of what students do and know by aligning units of study with Common Core standards and supporting struggling learners with scaffolds that include written sentence starters, graphic organizers, visual charts, and fluency stations in math. For example, fifth grade co-teachers plan "show and not tell" tasks with self-assessment checklist, narrative rubric, and mentor texts so all students practice writing more descriptively with rich sensory details, while first grade co-teachers facilitate a Math Congress where students solve real world, complex math problems by sharing strategies for comparing numbers. Across grades, students use the RADD (restate, answer, detail, detail) strategy for text-based written responses and they provide explanations in their verbal responses to tiered questions. As a result, most students know and state easily the lesson's teaching points and big ideas which then validates students' deeper understanding and ownership of what and why they are learning and engaging in rigorous tasks.
- Teachers engage students well with differentiated instruction and discussion protocols that motivate students to do their best as evident in meaningful work products. (1.2)
 - Students at this school describe their learning with superlatives, such as "the most interesting project", and they explain clearly why they are studying what they do. For example, fourth graders note that their group electricity project in science class with hands-on circuit building "made lights make more sense" and will lead to the school's first-ever Science Family Night in May. Similarly, third graders choose an issue that they seek to persuade their parents about in an upcoming persuasive writing unit and they first role play, with a partner, techniques for influencing their parents' thinking. Across classes, students work together in meaningful small group and challenging station work and they consistently follow discussion protocols to foster full participation and student-to-student questions. Additionally, teachers differentiate their teaching practices in process, such as student choice, learning environment, such as areas for multi-sensory teaching approaches, and content which then results in high level of student engagement and purpose across all classes.
- Teachers use and design high quality assessments, rubrics and checklists that enable staff to measure student progress, define student needs, and accurately implement strategic instruction that increases student mastery. (2.2)

- There is exceptional consistency and frequency in how teachers collect, analyze and share feedback with students and other teachers, as they adjust lesson and unit planning based on their analysis of students' data. For example, teachers excel at making on-going assessment integral to daily teaching practices through exit slips, student notebooks, conferences, running records, on-demand tasks, unit trackers and checklists. This common approach to reviewing assessments provides teachers with a clear portrait of student progress towards mastery of Common Core standards, which then leads to strategic adjustments in instructional planning and targeted interventions. By the midyear point, teachers know that students in grades K-2 have increased 1.6 reading levels and students in grades 3-5 have increased 1.3 reading levels, with 30% gains by lowest third students in math problem-solving involving computation and reasoning. Beyond monitoring and tracking student progress, school leaders and teachers also promote effective student self-assessment. Students reflect regularly on their work, effort and stamina through self-assessment ratings and individual goals, which further motivates students to take charge of their learning. Similarly, students speak knowledgeably about their achievement and next step learning with references to common rubrics across subject areas and common strategies, such as Dr. QVOSAC for math problem-solving, which serve as practical guideposts for understanding how to maximize academic achievement and demonstrate increased mastery in their work.
- School leaders and staff communicate very high expectations to students, families, and each other resulting in good consistency of academic and behavioral supports. (3.4)
 - Parents share many examples of the school's effective communication with families, including electronic newsletters, translated documents, norms and goals for parent meetings, and easy access to teachers. Ninety nine percent (99%) of parents on the 2013 School Survey agree that the school clearly communicates with families about a child's academic progress and this sentiment is echoed by parents in person. Beyond quarterly report cards, the school issues progress reports that detail what the current units of study are in reading, writing and math, and set specific academic and personal goals for the next term. Parents note that these progress reports, "...help us know how our child is doing before it is too late", which increases parents' awareness that the school holds high expectations for student achievement. Moreover, school leaders, faculty and staff have developed a school-wide approach, known as the "STAR matrix," to self-management and taking responsibilities for community. For the past two years, student suspensions have declined by 20% and student removals from classroom for misbehavior have decreased even more significantly, which means that all students benefit from instruction with fewer disruptions. Similarly, teachers affirm that school leaders expect a high degree of professionalism, collaboration, and consistent teaching practices. For example, during weekly data meetings, teachers research, plan and revise lessons based on student work and in consultation with staff developers and other providers. As a result, school leaders and staff collaborate effectively to share accountability for meeting increasingly higher standards of behavior and learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine what are already strategic organizational decisions with strengthening of technology for enhancing instructional purposes. (1.3)
 - School leaders and staff have taken innovative steps at school improvement, including rebranding the school's name and infusing character education in all learning, piloting instructional initiatives in special education reform, and embracing arts partnerships. As a result, this small school has earned a reputation for providing a dynamic and inclusive learning environment for all children and what had been declining enrollment has turned around with expansion of student registers. However, the school lags in the area of technology's use in classrooms for instructional purposes, with some students noting this as a deficiency in their readiness for middle school. Although *SMART* boards and Elmo document cameras are available in all classrooms, half of teachers responded in the 2013 School Survey that they did not receive professional development to help them meaningfully use technology in the classroom and this reflected in class observations where students interacted minimally with electronic or computer instructional tools. One exception was an interesting library assignment to use *Animoto* to create video-based book trailers, yet the instruction in that lesson focused primarily on how to log into *Animoto*. School leaders use technology resources effectively for organizational planning and communication with families; however, not yet instructionally and, thus, enriching teaching and learning for all students is hampered.
- Cultivate a nurturing adult learning environment to support teacher development and stability that ultimately support student growth. (1.4)
 - Children thrive academically and social-emotionally at this school, yet some adults express concerns about the professional work climate at the school. There have been tensions about trust and respect among adults, even as teachers and staff acknowledge that school leaders care deeply about students, faculty and staff. As a result, the school experienced a 40% rate of teacher turnover in 2012-13, with only one teacher retiring out of nine who exited the school. Moreover, some staff feel constrained by supervisory actions of administrators, such as requiring posting of lesson plans on on-line portal or collecting teacher self-reflection notes from watching videos of their teaching practices. School leaders have already taken positive steps to improve tone and communications with adults through candid dialogue about the noted concerns, designing internal surveys to understand staff sentiment periodically, and deliberate efforts at celebrating and aligning teaching practices and school community events. However, these steps have not yet gained traction.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The STAR Academy - P.S.63	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	