

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**P.S. 111 Adolph S. Ochs**

**Elementary-Middle School 111**

**440 West 53rd Street  
New York  
NY, 10019**

**Principal: Irma Medina**

**Dates of review: Jan 7- 8, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Veronica Yurcik**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

P.S. 111 Adolph S. Ochs is an elementary-middle school with 565 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 14% Black, 61% Hispanic, 14% White, and 11% Asian students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 24% 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 91.7%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is developing.**

### What the school does well

- Focused attention on student welfare builds an inclusive community and positive culture resulting in a safe and respectful learning environment that promotes the growth of students and staff. (1.4)
  - The principal identifies respectful interactions and relationships as the basis of a supportive school culture that promotes students' social-emotional development and academic learning. She explains that she has highlighted this approach through two book studies to assist teachers in working with behaviorally challenging students so that teachers can identify causal factors for behavior, communicate positively with students, and support students' adoption of coping skills, many of whom acknowledge this help. One student stated that a teacher "tries her best" to keep a fellow student calm and another student, describing an acting-out peer stated, "I don't know how they do it. They just go up to her and say in a respectful way to calm down to make them feel respected." Teachers exemplify the school emphasis on respect, trust, and relationship building, speaking in very positive terms about their students and their collaborative work to address pedagogical challenges. Additionally, the school created an advisory program for its middle school students, conducted specialized anti-bullying assemblies, contracted with an outside vendor to support classroom teachers' implementation of effective practices in fostering positive student behavior and youth development, increased adult presence in the school lunchroom, and is starting PBIS - Positive Behavior Intervention System. Over a two-year period, principal suspensions have dropped by 25% and superintendent suspensions by over 50%. These decreases give credence to improved student attitude and trust. Students attest that they have a voice in their school as teachers "ask them what they are thinking" in class, allow them choices in arts electives, let them read their stories aloud in class, and create posters about respect in advisory. In addition, students' opinions are reviewed by a fifth grade students' schoolyard planning team, which is working with a community-based organization to design a new play yard.
  - The school places value in providing holistic support for students' academic and social-emotional needs accomplished via weekly academic intervention and pupil personnel team meetings, and twice-monthly attendance team meetings. Teachers on the academic intervention team use a school created checklist to review student functioning and identify services for prioritized support. They visit classrooms to observe students and suggest interventions, encouraging use of alternate support strategies, and each member assumes responsibility for particular classes to ensure clearer communication and continuity of follow-up. Additionally, the school has established partnerships with several community-based organizations so that students receive additional counseling and mentoring, also allowing for their participation in specialized support groups for students who experienced divorce within their family or for dealing with issues of relocation. This umbrella of services and practices enables the school to be proactive in monitoring students' attendance and social-emotional development by matching students with suitable interventions linked to

learning needs. Students state that teachers help them learn strategies to reduce distractions helping them in their learning and relationships. One teacher specifically emphasized that the school was strong in its support of students, commenting that the school “does a nice job of lifting kids...” The current attendance rate for the year is 94% and attendance to date from September through December is .4% above the prior year for the same time.

- Frequent professional collaboration is increasing shared leadership and teacher capacity in improving student learning and achievement. (4.2)
  - Teachers work together with their grade level teams during scheduled weekly meetings centered on curriculum and upcoming units, discuss emerging issues, and review assessments. The second grade team, examining their students’ non-fiction writing, speculated that students need to increase volume and stamina and that more non-fiction reference materials were needed. The fourth grade teacher team reviewed a multiplication assessment, asking whether students struggled with the concepts or with reading, and reflected on how to use scaffolds without having students becoming too dependent on them. Team members noted that their classes have difficulty with word problems and that changing a graphic organizer to a box and bullet format helped improve students’ work. Teachers state that they make efforts to meet beyond their designated times. Consequently, teachers benefit from collaboration with grade peers, meeting at least weekly to plan, analyze, and review student work and assessments to consider how to improve their students’ academic achievement and hone teaching practices.
  - Designated teachers attend network-led curriculum professional development sessions. They assume responsibility for turn-keying information to supervisors and colleagues during weekly professional development periods and by email, and they facilitate grade level meetings. Emails from the fourth grade lead teacher show evidence that she makes recommendations to supervisors based on professional learning, identifies teachers in need of support, and schedules visits with them. Recently, the principal appointed teachers as literacy and math service staff to act as coaches. Thus, opportunities are increasing for teachers to build professional capacity and assume greater leadership in guiding school improvement.
- Formative assessments aligned to the curricula, promote instructional supports toward improving student performance. (2.2)
  - Teachers administer common pre- and post-unit assessments to gauge student understanding and progress. Teachers use this assessment data to identify students who need additional time to achieve performance outcomes relative to specific topics. As a result, targeted students receive pre-teaching on selected skills during extended day sessions to encourage improved achievement. Additionally, teachers have recognized the need to analyze more than fluency in Fountas & Pinnell running records administered three times yearly, and have requested additional training, which the school is planning to organize. Thus, teachers are becoming more cognizant of the data they need to adjust instruction strategically.
  - Teachers develop their own individual systems for conferencing, monitoring checklists for achievement of literacy and math skills, and

maintaining student portfolios. Additionally, they make their own decisions on the use of rubrics and in some cases allow students to grade themselves. Lead teachers have informed other teachers about available common core aligned rubrics and teacher teams have made decisions about adopting a common writing continuum assessment. Thus, inroads made in using common core aligned rubrics are improving the school's means of referencing standardized information relative to assessing and understanding student performance and progress to inform instructional adjustments for improving academic achievement.

## What the school needs to improve

- Implement a teacher observation system aligned to the Danielson common teaching framework to establish clear expectations and an awareness of pedagogical next steps to improve teacher pedagogy. (4.1)
  - The principal acknowledges that teachers have not received written feedback this year, citing a lack of time as the reason supervisors have not entered observation data into the Advance online record. As requested on day one of the review, the principal was unable to produce informal observations and had only one completed formal observation available for teachers who were visited during both this year and the prior school year. Teachers shared that supervisors visit their classrooms, but expressed uncertainty as to whether or not they have had an informal observation this year. The principal stated that although teachers have not received written feedback that they do receive oral feedback. During classroom visits with the reviewer, both the principal and assistant principal offered accurate analysis and next step suggestions regarding the teachers; however, there is no evidence that teachers have benefited from their insight. Teachers were unable to provide any examples of specific supervisory feedback that helped them improve their pedagogy, noting that they have received general feedback such as “We really liked how your classroom is setup,” or “We can see that you are really involved in addition and subtraction because your classroom charts show that.” Thus, the lack of frequent and targeted feedback and suggestions for improving pedagogical practice, and missing out on looking at student work products as an indicator of effective teaching, impedes opportunities for teachers’ on-going professional learning and growth.
  - The school does not have a system to analyze observation data to inform professional development, tenure, and retention, nor purposeful scheduling of observations based on teacher need. The principal states that such information “would” be available in Advance. The lack of scrutiny in evaluating teacher performance school-wide diminishes prospects for strategically planning professional learning, improving instruction school wide, and ensuring succession to maintain quality staffing.
- Ensure that Common Core aligned curricula is consistently adopted to establish coherent effort in delivering challenging learning opportunities that promote college and career readiness for all students. (1.1)
  - Teacher teams spoke about their efforts to implement the school’s new core curricula but there is inconsistency in school-wide adoption as some teachers have chosen not to adopt the new curricula. Curriculum maps

in use are two page documents that list topics by months and contain few explicit connections to common core standards. Teachers state that they use these maps to advise them on pacing. Independently, some teachers use a variety of supplemental resources, and grade teacher teams adhere to the old writing syllabus as they judge the new curriculum to be insufficient. Furthermore, the school has not made any purposeful decisions to emphasize particular instructional shifts or to come to a consensus regarding current modifications. Therefore, teachers are inconsistently implementing the school's new core curricula. The lack of consistency and defined focus impairs school wide coherent adoption of rigorous curriculum and academic tasks to achieve common core standards and promote college and career readiness for all students.

- To engage a diversity of learners, the school provides a wide variety of electives and learning experiences such as chess, band, visual arts, drama, baton, book clubs, science team, computers, and sports. The school, however, has not adopted a focal set of instructional strategies for its large English language learner population, nor does it track its former English language learner students' progress. Additionally, the process of analyzing student work and data across the school is a developing skill set for teachers, thus potential key instructional modifications are not always identified. For example, teachers have assessed that students have math computation skills but are challenged by word problems. However, they cannot state specifically why word problems challenge students, and thus while there is intentional planning to create different types of learning opportunities and scaffolds to engage and allow access for a variety of learners, astute refinements to ensure that all students are cognitively engaged are not tactically planned.
- Clarify belief systems and the alignment of teaching to the common teaching framework to improve pedagogical practice so that pedagogy addresses the needs of all learners and increases student engagement. 1.2
  - While the administration describes the school's common belief system as the workshop model of teaching, teachers state that it is not mandated and that the principal trusts their judgment. They state that they set professional goals using the Danielson rubric but they cannot articulate any school wide focus in terms of the framework. While it is expected, within the workshop model, that students have opportunities to share their thinking with peers, consistent opportunities for students to speak with each other or work within strategic groups were not observed during class visits, although students were compliantly engaged. Teachers tended to engage students one at a time or in ability-based groups carefully guiding students with step-by step-directions. For example, as student groups completed a math performance assessment, teachers asked on-going questions and directed students to underline key words although some students appeared not to need that level of support. In another class, students were shown a completed Venn diagram and simply read entries rather than share their own thinking by constructing a Venn diagram to do comparative analysis on their own. Since the link between belief systems and pedagogy is not well established, application of practice that places emphasis on student ownership is significantly inconsistent and results in uneven opportunities for students to demonstrate their thinking.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: P.S. 111 Adolph S. Ochs	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

<b>UD</b>	Underdeveloped	<b>D</b>	Developing	<b>P</b>	Proficient	<b>WD</b>	Well Developed
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