Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Spruce Street School

Elementary/Middle School M397

12 Spruce Street
Manhattan
NY10018

Principal: Nancy Harris

Dates of review: December 3-4, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Maria Robustelli

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Spruce Street School is an early childhood intermediate school with 362 students from kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 3% Black, 12% Hispanic, 57% White, and 16% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school offers a rigorous and coherent curriculum aligned to the standards that provide all learners with a wide range of robust learning experiences that increase students' critical thinking. (1.1)

    - The school employs an effective backward-planning approach embedding authentic and purposeful learning experiences into the school's curricula with essential questions to drive student work, including research projects. Furthermore, ongoing collaboration among the school leadership, teachers, and educational consultants, strategically allows staff to align the curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), by creating a school wide approach to increase students' writing skills focusing on three specific styles. Additionally, across classrooms, curriculum artifacts evidenced the strategic inclusion of the instructional shifts by students using informational text, citing evidence, and using text-based answers through scheduled daily writing across curricula. For example, a fourth grade English language arts learning task had students use an excerpt from a Christopher Columbus journal to formulate an opinion and gather evidence from the text to support how people in the past viewed the world and how this view affected their choices and actions. In addition, across the school, learning activities and units include a variety of learning opportunities to engage students in thinking via investigation, citation, and drawing conclusions from the text. These activities provide foundational skills for college and career readiness for all learners, and learning tasks afford students the ability to create their own meaning, integrate skills into real life scenarios, and become independent thinkers. For instance, in a third grade unit of study, the adjustments for English language learners included visual supports, and for special education students the curricula was adjusted by chunking the texts, thus providing access to the learning tasks. As a result, curricula and academic tasks expose students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, to curricula that foster critical thinking skills and rigorous habits for all learners.

- The school's beliefs of differentiation and inquiry-based learning provide authentic opportunities to engage all students in challenging tasks resulting in meaningful student work products. (1.2)

    - School leaders and staff articulated that the school's instructional beliefs are grounded in the Danielson Framework for Teaching, and research to foster students' critical thinking and build strong content knowledge. Furthermore, learning tasks are planned to engage students in high level discussions, make written responses to different audiences, and use text-based evidence to support their work. In addition, across grades and classrooms, teachers use questioning, research, and investigation to further increase students' discussions and participation. For example, during a fourth grade lesson, the teacher had students use information from multiple sources they had researched on Columbus to answer questions such as, "Why did Columbus show a superior attitude toward the Native Americans?" and, "How does who Columbus was affect how we see the world?" Students were given an opportunity to respond to each other by agreeing or disagreeing. In a third grade integrated classroom, students worked collaboratively in small groups and pairs using unit blocks and other strategies to solve multiplication problems. Moreover, in the classrooms visited, students worked on peer editing activities and used a writing checklist to self-assess their work, thus

requiring students to engage in high levels of thinking and discussions. Furthermore, students were also able to articulate the content topic they were learning about, the skills set they were practicing, and the specific reason why they turn-and-talk in every class, including English language learners and students with disabilities. As a result, teaching practices and teacher discussions across the school support these beliefs in a coherent manner as evidenced in student work products and high levels of thinking.

- Communication about high expectations and the availability of supports to meet expectations result in strong partnerships between teachers and parents to prepare students for college and career. (3.4)

    - As evidenced in the principal's School Self Evaluation Form (SEFF), the school has "developed a cohesive approach that honors our instructional vision and the spirit of our community. Teachers and children are treated as individuals who are vibrant parts of their learning community." High expectations for attendance, behavior, and academic performance are communicated to staff in the school-wide staff handbook, weekly staff e-mails, monthly messages from the principal, and grade team meetings and planning sessions. Ongoing supports and training is provided through differentiated professional development, such as outside consultants and individual and grade team meetings, to provide targeted support of school-wide expectations as well as elements of the Danielson framework and has resulted in a shared culture of accountability for expectations as evidenced in observations and teacher reflections. As a result, there is a culture of mutual accountability for these expectations that support student learning and learning outcomes.

    - The school provides opportunities for parent partnerships that include orientation sessions, curricular morning workshops, bi-monthly "Learning Alongside your Child" sessions, progress reports, research study celebrations, and teacher newsletters and e-mails to inform them of expectations and to communicate student performance and progress. Parents communicated that these supports as well as the approachability and ongoing dialogue with teachers and the principal create "fluid conversations" that allow them to successfully partner with staff to ensure progress of their children. The school has also created a school-wide goal this year to continue to deepen parent communication around curriculum and instructional outcomes. Based on an interim school-based learning environment survey, the school reported a 20% gain in engagement and communication regarding what parents need to do to prepare children for success in life from the 2012-2013 School Survey report. As a result, progress towards their children's achievement and success in school and its connection to a path of college and career readiness is clearly articulated by parents. There is also a shared understanding of clear feedback that prepares students for the next level as evidenced by parental involvement in ongoing workshops, participation in school's conferences, and the School Survey responses.

- The school leader uses data from classroom observations and the Danielson Framework for Teaching to provide meaningful feedback and develop professional growth leading to improved teaching practice. (4.1)

    - For the past three years, the school administration worked in developing teaching practice using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In order to create a shared understanding of effective practices using the Advance tool, school leaders have provided faculty conferences, professional development sessions, and staff instructional retreats to unpack the expectations and brainstorm best teaching practices. In addition, the school administration and

teachers triangulate data from observation reports, peer-feedback, student work, and assessment results, to strategically inform professional development and next steps for improving teaching practice. Teachers stated that administrators provide immediate targeted feedback through individual conversations followed with next steps aligned to teacher's professional goals. For example, school leaders conduct daily classrooms visits and immediate feedback is communicated via informal and formal meetings where the teacher and administrator co-create strengths and next steps as well as identify resources, including one-to-one coaching support. Each session is documented in individual teacher binders that include student data, observation reports, and professional development notes to guide conversations with supervisors to support teacher growth. Initial planning conferences and ongoing check-in meetings allow opportunities to review, reflect, and modify goals and next steps based on classroom observations and an analysis of student work and data. In the teacher meeting, teachers shared that these supports have had a positive impact on their instructional practice. For example, focused feedback on classroom procedures and routines to support behavior management in a first year teacher's classroom has led to improved academic outcomes for students as evidenced by student work samples and classroom observations. To quote some teachers, they describe their learning experiences as "supportive and engaging," "collaborative and rigorous," "resourceful and consistent," and "focused."

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen school wide assessment practices to isolate trends and patterns in student progress to purposefully inform instructional decisions to increase student academic performance. (2.2)
    - The school uses common assessments, including observations, checklists, running records, Fountas and Pinnell reading levels, and rubrics to determine student progress. Individual teachers use data to determine student strengths and needs, create student groupings, and plan interventions. For example, teachers assess students using the Words their Way spelling inventory to identify spelling needs, such as short vowels, digraphs and blends, and to form student groups. Across classrooms, teachers also make modifications to include visual supports, graphic organizers, special lined paper, peer partners, and appropriate leveled text in their lesson plans. However, at this time, there is no structure for analyzing students' performance data to identify trends and learning patterns which can inform the impact of instructional decisions for individual or groups of students. The administration stated that the school is beginning to gather data from units of study from last year and this school year to identify and analyze students' strengths and challenges in order to make strategic adjustments to the curricula and instruction. As a result, classroom level and school-wide data does not lead to focused decisions about implementation or monitoring specific instructional strategies, thus limiting opportunities to develop strategic supports to increase achievement for all learners.

- Deepen the work of teacher teams in their analysis of student learning and progress to strategically develop instructional strategies that result in mastery of students' goals. (4.2)
    - Teacher teams meet to further collaborate in creating CCLS aligned rubrics, and analyze student work, and assessment data to adjust units of study. In addition, school leaders provided training in facilitation techniques and protocols for looking at data and student work to assist teachers' discussions

in developing next steps for ensuring students' learning. During a teacher team meeting, teachers brought different levels of writing samples from the "All About Me" books. However, teachers did not refer to this work or used protocols to discuss and identify students' strengths and learning challenges to develop targeted teaching strategies and inform their lesson planning. Instead, teachers focused on discussing instructional strategies that were not linked to the student work being discussed. Although all teachers engage in inquiry, meetings do not lead to strategic discussions and analysis of student data to further support school-wide instructional practice, thus maximizing academic achievement for all learners.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: SPRUCE STREET SCHOOL	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	

Instructional Core

To what extent does the school regularly...	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

To what extent does the school...	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

To what extent does the school...	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