

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Teachers College Community School**

**Elementary School 517  
168 Morningside Avenue  
New York  
NY 10027**

**Principal: Jeanene Worrell-Breeden**

**Dates of review: December 10 – 11, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Teachers College Community School is an elementary school with 167 students from Prekindergarten through grade 2. The school population comprises 44% Black, 19% Hispanic, 22% White, 7% Asian students and 8% other students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 7% 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 94.4%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Exceptional in-house support services provide students with consistent conditions to succeed socially and academically, thus creating an environment that is highly conducive to learning. (1.4)
  - Parents state that the school provides an “educational roundness” in a family atmosphere which they fully appreciate. It is quite evident that a deep sense of trust and respect permeates the entire school community. “Be nice, be kind, everyone takes care of community” are the core tenets espoused by the school leader as the school continues to grow by one grade each year. Both students and parents appreciate that they can turn to teachers, the principal and the parent coordinator, to help resolve personal issues and concerns that interfere with learning. The Incredible Years program fosters students’ self-expression through puppetry techniques. Weekly circle time focuses on specific attributes such as kindness while providing students with strategies they can use when they feel the need to calm themselves during a crisis. The principal opened an “inquiry room” for kindergarten students during periods seven and eight to further develop their play and socialization skills. Various rituals and routines encourage student voice and students openly share their thoughts and feelings. The principal notes that this initiative has helped to reduce behavioral complaints. During the large student group meeting students stated that they earn rewards for appropriate behaviors and they write complimentary notes and celebrate each other’s accomplishments. Students in this current early grade school are learning to build consensus and feel that teachers respect their thoughts. As a result, their leadership skills are cultivated which helps to bolster students’ self-esteem as evidenced by classroom visits and conversations with student groups.
  - The school’s partnership with Teachers’ College (TC) coordinates well with school-based support structures to address the social-emotional and academic needs of students and their families. The school-based extended day program ensures that students have access to robotics, nutrition classes, music and other enrichment activities three times weekly. Parents stated that the principal and school staff knows individual students by name and that they develop close confidential relationships with a number of students. Students who are tutored are demonstrating better academic success in class with increased levels noted on running records. The special education coordinator serves as the liaison with external agencies. School psychologist field work interns from TC provide counseling services and help strategically link parents with specific agencies and services as needed. Interns are presently supporting a gender-based group of students who were displaying difficulty making and maintaining friendships. This successful initiative has reduced bullying complaints. Additionally, attendance team members utilize a laser-like focus when reviewing attendance data. Noted trends result in focused interventions and rewards such as home visits, phone calls, assemblies and student recognition on bulletin boards. The principal indicated specific concerns with tardiness. Class parents or other parent volunteers help to support students who are tardy by transporting them to school. These targeted efforts result in monthly class and grade attendance increases, an overall school

attendance rate ranging between 94 - 95%, as well as a notable decrease in the number of tardy students.

- School leaders share their high expectations with staff and effectively communicate with families, who have high praise, resulting in productive home-school partnerships that support student success. (3.4)
  - The principal, through weekly cabinet and planning meetings, consistently communicates her instructional focus. As the result of a School Based Option (SBO), school staff participates in professional development activities and team meetings for two hours every Wednesday afternoon. The principal prioritizes the Citywide Instructional Expectations and teachers use videos and available online tools from ARIS Learn as well as Teachscape to norm their understanding of the Danielson framework. Teacher teams are granted tremendous autonomy and teacher leaders prepare and share meeting minutes and agendas with the principal. These leaders indicate that their ability to have a voice in shaping curricula and instructional decisions contributes to their leadership growth and sense of empowerment. Additionally, all staff welcomes the training provided by their peers, TC staff developers and consultants. The continuous and transparent cycle of support creates high levels of individual and team accountability leading to improved teaching practices and student learning, as evidenced by classroom visits and student work products.
  - Via a principal's initiative entitled Parents as Learning Partners, parents are afforded the opportunity to visit classrooms every Friday and then conclude their visit to the school with coffee with the principal for one hour. Parents stated that these meetings are reciprocal, allowing both school leaders and families to mutually exchange ideas and discuss initiatives aligned to the school's goals and principal's expectations. Teachers on each grade send home a weekly curriculum update so that parents are kept abreast of learning objectives and expectations for specific units of study. Members of the parent association stated that they in turn also send home weekly updates to families in order to support the transparent and accountable systems established by the principal and staff. Letters of recognition, academic awards and student assemblies are but a small sample of the myriad of ways high expectations are communicated to families and students. Staff and parents both stated that the academic expectations embraced by the school community ensure that students are prepared for rigorous demands when they leave this elementary school. As such, during their respective meetings, parents, staff and students reported heightened awareness and students' increased aspirations for college enrollment and high-level careers.
- Analysis of student performance data provides the administrator and teachers with a comprehensive view of students' strengths and next steps resulting in targeted interventions to positively impact school performance. (2.2)
  - Teachers use assorted streams of data from varied sources including Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) assessments, Discovery Benchmarks, writing continuum benchmark data, conference notes, rubric scores, and teacher prepared tests, as well as design project-based math Common Core aligned benchmark assessments to gauge student understanding of the taught curricula. In a second grade class

during reading workshop, the individual conferences that the teacher facilitated with students were aligned to their individual reading goals, while in a math class the teacher used formative data to group students and provide targeted support in order to ensure that they met the learning objective. As such, students are becoming cognizant of the connections between tasks and the expectations espoused by the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Teachers provide feedback to students noting strengths and next steps. Consequently, teachers are demonstrating ways of understanding and sharing feedback on students' assessment results relative to select standards, with the focus on increased student outcomes, as noted in assessment binders and the online running record tracker system.

- Teachers create common performance tasks such as the second grade task for their character study unit and, with the assistance of the math consultant, develop baseline assessments in math. Results from these assessments are tracked in data binders and are used to identify strengths and needs, as well as promote ongoing conversation and reflection. The principal and teachers use these results, including student work products, to measure student progress toward specific goals and to make needed changes to the curricula. For example, the kindergarten teachers decided to extend the unit entitled *Looking Closely- Observing Like Scientists*, when, after a review of student work products, they noted that students had not fully grasped specific concepts. Teachers review results and, in consultation with the principal, create individual plans for students; targeted intervention groups are fluid based on a review of student mastery of specific concepts every six to eight weeks. Teachers facilitate guided reading groups with specific students on a rotational basis, in order to review their goals, note progress made and co- create next steps. For example, conference schedules are noted and data binders depict teachers' analysis of assessment results aligned to specific skills and strategies. As such, teachers formulate specific action plans to address student needs.
- The principal supports teacher development through frequent observation and feedback cycles aligned to professional development with a focus on improving instructional practices throughout the school. (4.1)
  - A review of the observation calendar and written feedback provide evidence that the principal shares frequent, specific, and timely feedback with staff across Danielson domains and components. An Advance talent coach visits the school and supports the principal on the accuracy and meaningfulness of feedback. All teachers elected to be video-taped and these videos are used to build coherent practices across classrooms. During individual conversations with teachers, the principal infuses formative and summative assessment results, including student work products, and uses this information to tailor professional development sessions to identified teacher needs. New teachers receive mentoring support from an experienced pedagogue. At the beginning of the school year the principal met with teachers who self-assessed their needs. Based on teachers' feedback, they develop professional goals and participate in monthly specialty group sessions at TC to support their identified area of growth. As a result, several teachers continue to refine their pedagogical practices and exhibit understanding of grade appropriate strategies that elicit basic student understanding.

## What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen the alignment between teacher practice and the school's beliefs about learning to ensure high levels of engagement and thinking so that all students reach their potential. (1.2)
  - The principal's belief about learning ensures that teachers prepare lessons that target the specific needs and strengths of students and employ strategies that address a range of student ability levels. To meet students' needs, teachers use scaffolding tools such as graphic organizers and manipulatives to support writing and math. However, since most students are mainly exposed to common shared text during read alouds, they have difficulty making specific references and citing text to support their answers. As such, students do not productively struggle with complex text and some teachers' plans miss out on demonstrating strategies to sufficiently engage students in higher order thinking so that all work products and activities are cognitively demanding of all learners, especially those performing at the highest achievement levels.
  - Teachers are beginning to employ open-ended questions to spark discussions and students in some classrooms are questioning each other's assumptions and ideas. For example, during a math lesson, the teacher continually asked probing questions and students shared varied strategies, paraphrased responses and questioned each other. However, in some classrooms, questions and answers still remain between teacher and individual student. Consequently, thought-provoking questions, conversations that give students the chance to support their views with evidence, change their minds, and use questions as a way to further learning, are not yet the norm across classes and grades. This results in uneven levels of student thinking and participation across classrooms.
- Expand on the process of the refinement of Common Core aligned curricula across all grades and subject areas in order to build coherence and emphasize rigorous skills to prepare students for the next level. (1.1)
  - Although academic tasks at times emphasize higher order skills, tasks are not consistently rigorous enough to challenge students performing at varied ability levels. Over the summer, staff deliberately adjusted the curricula in order to make changes to the math scope and sequence and to integrate CCLS into math and English language arts units of study. However, these practices are not yet evident across all grades and subjects. For example, although refinement of the social studies and science units provide evidence of essential questions, at times developed tasks lack rigor and alignment to State standards across grades and student work products at times do not demonstrate immersion in the unit. This is a work in progress, and teacher teams continue to make further adjustments regarding the balance of informational and literary texts across a range of disciplines. Additionally, some independent student texts used for the teaching of specific units are not well aligned to the teaching point thus precluding more advanced students from broadening their knowledge base. Related tasks do not consistently build in relevant challenge and rigor, thus precluding some students from achieving at even higher levels.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Teachers College Community School	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			X				
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<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				
<b>School Culture</b>							
<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			
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<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				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed