

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**The Steinway School**

**Elementary/Middle School 084**

**22-45 41<sup>st</sup> Street  
Queens  
NY 11105**

**Principal: John Buffa**

**Dates of review: November 12-13, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Dr. Philip A. Composto**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Steinway School is an elementary/middle school with 370 students from grades pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 5% Black, 36% Hispanic, 45% White, 12% Asian and 2% other students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 95.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school is a safe place where students are engaged in learning and benefit from the effective level of support they receive for their personal and academic development. (1.4 )
  - One of the school's goals is to continue to cultivate a safe and respectful learning environment where all students develop their personal growth, academic skills, strengths, interests and talents. Over the last few years, the school community noticed that middle school students struggled to consistently follow school rules and commit to their responsibilities. For example, the school realized that life skills such as persistence, work habits, communication and collaboration are just as important as academic skill building. This year, they implemented the Overcoming Obstacles program with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. This program utilizes strategies such as conflict resolution, communication and teamwork. In one activity, teams of students collaborate to figure out the combination of numbers that equals exactly 100. This activity motivated students to work together and solve the equation first. This not only enhanced teamwork, but required precise answers and persistence. In addition, middle school students read, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens," by Sean Convey as a class read-aloud. The seven habits including "be proactive," "begins with the end in mind," "put first things first," "think win-win," "seek first to understand, then to be understood," "synergize," and "sharpen the saw" are discussed in length with real-life examples that are relatable for the students. Consequently, parents and staff state that through these school-wide activities, students continuously demonstrate sensitivity to the needs of others as noted in a 50% reduction in superintendent's suspensions reported in the Online Occurrence Reporting System (OORS).
  - The school attendance team consists of the principal, assistant principal, attendance aide, guidance counselor, social worker and attendance teacher. Monthly meetings coordinate outreach and supports that align to the needs of families in order to ensure that students come to school to continue making academic progress. The school's outreach to parents is done through the Department of Education (DOE) wake-up call system. School leaders congratulate and celebrate classes that have 100% attendance and honor these students at Values assembly programs each month. The guidance counselor discusses the importance of coming to school and being a responsible citizen through "Respect for All" lessons that are routinely conducted in classrooms. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) acknowledges and celebrates parents whose children have perfect attendance at monthly meetings. As a result, the overall attendance has increased During the 2012-13 school year the year to date attendance percentage was 94.5% as compared to this school year where it is 96.1%.
- Teaching practices across the school reflect a common belief about student learning and consistently provide purposeful supports in order to meet varied student needs and ensure progress. (1.2)

- Administrators conduct mini-observations using the Danielson Framework for Teaching and discuss the components of the framework with staff using low inference observation notes. Teachers, with assistance from school leaders, develop next steps and action plans to enhance their practice. Teachers across grades and subjects meet during common periods and an additional period once a week to plan and design units of study that incorporate student learning beliefs and activities with multiple entry points to engage, challenge and deepen students' understanding at all levels. Questions are pre-planned using the depth of knowledge (DOK) matrix to elicit a range of complex responses including, skill concept, strategic thinking and extended thinking. For example, a fourth grade class was observed reading "Tarantula Scientist", with a focus for readers on using experiences and events to create and depict a lifelike experience, and extended by a writing focus to use details from a text when drawing inferences. The teaching strategies and scaffolds for English language learners (ELLs) included the teacher using photographs to help students understand how spiders produce and use silk. One of the photos illustrated how the spider used silk to make a sack for its eggs. Additionally, vocabulary was scaffolded for students with disabilities (SWD) and ELLs as the teacher provided these subgroups with a labeled photograph of each vocabulary word. Each student maintains an individualized word bank of new words. Students with disabilities needing extra support with reading aloud are supported by oral reading in a small group. Higher performing students completed graphic organizers to record and organize examples of similes and metaphors from the selection of the "Tarantula Scientist" text. As a result, 98% of students in the class met the benchmark expectation on the teacher-made lesson assessment.
- School leaders and teachers effectively align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and offer engaging learning experiences that challenge students and support their learning. (1.1)
  - School leaders review the Citywide Instructional Expectations and conduct an analysis of student performance data including running records, Ready Gen Unit Tests, Go Math chapter tests and the New York State English as a Second Language Assessment Test (NYSESLAT) to support their work on the alignment of the curriculum to CCLS. . Analysis of the Ready Gen assessment identified that a percentage of students are not equipped to write informational text, a key standard identified for this grade. As a result, the first grade team is working on an English language arts unit to ensure that students are prepared to write informational texts. In addition, students had difficulty turning a statement into a question. The team decided to adapt the curriculum to fit their specific needs by allowing students to use additional resources when writing their informational text responses. For example, selected students used class generated charts on how to gather and write about new information. English language learners used a chart when responding to What I Know, Want to Know, How will I find out and what I learned (KWHL). As a result, 80% of the students were able to successfully create a question and answer book about an animal and its environment thereby meeting benchmarks in writing in preparation for the higher expectations in their next levels of learning.

- The grade 8 team analyzed their social studies Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) pre-assessment. The data revealed that students are not equipped to write an argument citing specific evidence from the text. The following strategies were introduced: post-it prioritizing, students place a post-it on each section or paragraph of the text and write down the important information for that section and evidence based questioning for the text. Students located answers in the texts by highlighting the words, putting a post it, or writing out the answer. In addition, students used the 3-2-1 reading protocol, listening and discussing three things they learned, two things they found interesting and one question they had. Teachers noted that as a result of these lessons, student writing was deeper and more interesting as they added important details to their stories and an increase in students' use of citing specific evidence from text. Their writing products met the instructional goal of the school, to write a strong argument by providing details to support their thoughts. These planned and implemented strategies by the collaborative efforts of teachers help the students defend their argument. As a result, 90% of students are now able to defend an argument citing specific examples from the text.
- The school conveys high expectations that promote parent involvement and support learning so that staff, students and families work together toward achieving the school's goals. (3.4)
  - School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire school community at faculty and grade conferences, through weekly bulletins, letters and memos about the mini observation process as well as professional goals set by teachers and administrators based on selected competencies from the Danielson Framework. The Common Core Library consisting of resources, videos and books outlining each of the standards is used to access videos of classroom practice. The principal and assistant principal use a Department of Education (DOE) low inference note taking template that is related to the Danielson Framework to identify strengths and next steps in improving classroom instruction. After the observation, supervisors meet with teachers to provide immediate feedback. As a result of consistently communicating high expectations, 100% of the teachers set realistic measurable annual goals. The goals are tracked for progress weekly by the administration through class visits and the review of student data to ensure accountability toward meeting the specific targets leading to the goals.
  - Families receive monthly parent teacher association (PTA) newsletters which provide them with information regarding their child's learning experiences. Teachers are responsible for contributing to this publication with specific items related to the curriculum in all grades and subjects, including the skills students need to acquire to meet the higher expectations for learning as they begin to prepare for college and careers. Student agenda books are used as another tool to help with parent communication. For example, students write weekly goals at the top of their agenda book that based on their current performance. These agendas provide parents with ongoing information and opportunities to consistently communicate and be involved in their child's education. Parents state that they appreciate the agenda books to support ongoing communication between school and home. The agendas also provide opportunities for parents to express their questions and concerns about

what their children are learning in school. Parent workshops are offered each month on topics such as, tips for talking with children about high expectations and goal setting, Common Core Standards, and helping your child to be a better reader. As a result, parents are aware of what the children are learning in school and are able to support them with specific suggested strategies and resources as noted by responses in a parent survey.

## **What the school needs to improve**

- Strengthen teacher assessment practices to reflect effective feedback in order to make instructional adjustments and provide clear next learning steps to improve student outcomes. (2.2)
  - Student work is available in well-organized folders in addition to the displays throughout the classrooms. It is also evident that teachers celebrate students' best efforts through checkmarks and written comments and use this information to inform instruction. However, not all student work includes feedback in the form of next steps for improvement. As a result, teachers are not fully able to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum or instructional decisions or to consistently provide students with their next learning steps, thus limiting progress. Teacher teams and individual teachers use running records, Go Math and Ready Gen formative and end of unit assessments to supplement summative data and identify student performance levels. However, the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment within instructional periods to make immediate adjustments to lessons is not a fully embedded practice across the school. This limits the teacher's ability to pinpoint and address the specific needs of student subgroups and modify targeted interventions to accelerate learning. As a result, instructional strategies and learning tasks are not always strategically revised, hindering opportunities to meet the needs of all students.
- Enhance the use of classroom observations along with the analysis of student work and data to improve professional development and student achievement. (4.1)
  - School leaders offer recommendations for teachers to improve their instructional practice through formal observations and analysis of student work products using a common instructional lens grounded in the Danielson framework. However, although they communicate high expectations, school leaders have not yet fully engaged in a consistent practice of conducting short, frequent cycles of classroom visits to provide clear targeted and actionable next steps to assist teachers in improving instruction. In addition, systems for making informed decisions in order to further develop teachers' skills are emerging. Therefore, feedback is not always clear as it does not specifically target actionable areas for improvement. This limits school leaders' ability to identify teachers' specific areas for improvement, and design and facilitate professional development to strengthen their teaching craft and positively impact student outcomes.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Steinway School	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			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>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>