

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**The School in the Gardens**

**Elementary School 101**

**2 Russell Place  
Forest Hills, N.Y. 11375**

**Principal: Monique Lopez-Paniagua**

**Dates of review: October 24 - 25, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Beverly Ffolkes-Bryant, Ed.D.**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The School in the Gardens is an elementary school with 626 students from pre-kindergarten through grade six. The school population comprises 3% Black, 12% Hispanic, 46% White, 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 5% Multi-Racial, and 33% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 1% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 96.1%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is well developed.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Curricular modifications using the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) effectively meet the very diverse learning needs of students in order to support them in reaching their potential. (1.1)
  - The school's work with the CCLS is driven by "Common Core Standards and Strategies Flip Charts" promulgated by Mentoring Minds, that allows teachers and teacher teams to reference specific standards and incorporate them into their curriculum units. As a result of the instructional cabinet's itemized analysis from the English language arts and State math tests, the kinds of questions that most students got incorrect were identified, resulting in teachers incorporating more rigorous questioning into their lessons. The writing for kindergarten students revealed the need for more foundational skills. Therefore, the decision was made to use Foundations and Leveled Literacy by Fountas and Pinnell to incorporate foundational skills in K-2 instruction. Additionally, the instructional cabinet uses selected materials as a tool to identify gaps in the school's ELA and math curriculum, so that teachers can purposefully plan rigorous lessons. Thus, the attention to aligning the school's curriculum to the standards is resulting in students developing higher order thinking skills and acceleration in their progress towards attaining learning targets.
  - The English as a second language (ESL) teacher and special education support services teacher (SETSS) use the Mentoring Minds flipcharts to develop tasks aligned to the curriculum for use as Tier I intervention for small group instruction. In addition, the principal has given each classroom teacher a list of their English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities (SWD) along with a list of recommendations of teaching strategies/accommodations, that along with standards aligned strategies found in the flipcharts, are implemented to help the students achieve. Thus, these opportunities ensure that all students are engaged, their needs are met, and there is congruence in the delivery of instruction to students.
- Students demonstrate high levels of engagement in well-matched lessons, and exhibit good behavior and enthusiasm for learning to reach their potential. (1.2)
  - Weekly teachers' participation in professional development led by the principal or someone from the instructional cabinet supports the alignment of teaching practices with the Danielson Teaching Framework as evidenced by the teacher observations inputted into Teach Boost. Thus far, seven sessions around domain three has helped focus most observations around the questioning that was conducted by the teacher, and teacher practice around questioning and discussion techniques has increased as evident in Teach Boost. Furthermore, teaching practices around questioning, student-to-student discussions, and small group work were evident in every classroom as the teachers were conducting their lessons. Most questions were high-level discussion questions with

multiple possibilities or pathways. The inclusion of higher-level discussions and questions in planning was evident during the teacher team meeting where teachers were discussing the incorporation of questions for lessons. As a result, there is a collective understanding of shared norms and values that strongly supports a classroom instruction conducive to school-wide achievement.

- The principal's direction relative to teachers setting individual student goals, along with student conference notes is an outgrowth of the teacher looking at student's 'On Demand Writing' and using Carl Anderson's *Qualities of Good Writing* as a reference tool. Teachers also set reading goals based on comprehension skills. Consequently, teachers work with small groups of students who share the same common goals. This was evident in two classrooms where scaffolds for English language learners, (ELL's) such as graphic organizers and outlines to guide their writing supported ELL's in every classroom observed. For math instruction, teachers provide manipulatives, and in a second grade classroom struggling students were using counters to work out their problems. The English as a second language teacher (ESL) utilizes scaffolds such as graphic organizers, sketching before writing and oral language to support students in their writing, leading to high-level work as displayed on the hallway bulletin boards. Small group strategies and one-on-one conferences are conducted on a regular basis with Students with disabilities (SWD) and ELL's, as teachers coach students in their work during that time. Thus, student learning and teacher's lessons that reflect careful thought regarding the individual needs of students, create a consistent instructional focus school-wide as evidenced in the State data showing that ELL students outscored ELL's in peer schools.
- Relationships across the school are warm, supportive and inclusive of students, teachers, and parents, who feel valued and take pride in being part of the school community. (1.4)
  - In the past, the school's student council has been a group of fourth through sixth grade students, elected by their peers, who meet monthly with the principal to voice their concerns and plan various school-wide community service projects. The student council also conducted assemblies on Bullying and Cyber bullying which were U-streamed online. The impact was that classrooms were having discussions for the first time about what bullying is and how it can be managed in a school setting. This year, the redesign of the student council aligns its focus to the "*Positive Action*" curriculum leading to the renaming of the student council to the Positive Action Leadership Team. Students in grades three through six will have the opportunity to become Positive Action Leaders and work with administrators, teachers, and students, on school-wide projects, and be a role model to their peers, thereby impacting the academic and social growth of students.
  - Based on teacher and student responses on the 2012 Learning Environment Survey, which indicated that bullying and lack of respect were an issue at our school, the school's purchase of the "*Positive Action*" curriculum with six units allows for lessons embedded into the school day, three days each week. Teachers were provided professional development prior to the program's implementation and the school's guidance counselor works with teachers on program implementation and

provides individual supports as needed using the Guidance Kit for at-risk students. Parents are invited to classrooms once a month as part of the program as either participants or to teach. This new initiative is making students aware of how they treat themselves and others as they complete a reflection sheet should there be an occurrence. This new initiative provides for communication, decision-making, and positive socio/emotional skills to be communicated school wide to support students for future academic and personal success.

- The school has established effective systems for monitoring teaching practice with a clear focus on improving instructional practices to improve student outcomes. (4.1)
  - New teachers to the school receive personalized professional development based on administrative walkthroughs and observations and each teacher is assigned an experienced mentor teacher who meets weekly with him or her. Teachers are required to maintain a log of support that is reviewed by the mentor or an administrator, there is ongoing communication between teachers, mentors and administrators, and as new teachers attend all professional development offerings they write their reflections on New Teacher Templates, which are signed off by the principal. Walkthroughs after these professional development offerings offer further feedback and during observations administrators look for evidence of what was taught during the professional development sessions. For example, a new teacher was given feedback about how she managed her students during transitions and during the next visit, two weeks later; the teacher had managed transitions for students smoothly. Furthermore, for all teacher observations administrators look for evidence of Danielson's Framework and then provide subsequent feedback. Consequently, the principal is able to make precise teacher performance evaluations and provide specific feedback that informs the quality of the teacher's work and suggest highly tailored next steps for teachers to improve professionally For example, based on trends from observations, teachers were not requiring students to give specific text evidence in conversation or in writing. The principal conducted professional development around text evidence, and then conducted instructional rounds to observe whether teachers were pushing students to support their thinking with text evidence. As a result, based on the trends seen in TeachBoost, observations across the school moved from developing to effective in Danielson 3b for citing text evidence.
  - Using the *Danielson Framework for Teaching*, the *Citywide Instructional Expectations* as well as Kenneth Blanchard's Situational Leadership Model, the principal has categorized the staff using four buckets, Willing/More Than Capable, Unwilling/Capable, Unwilling/Incapable and Willing/Incapable. After observations, written feedback identifies the specific 'bucket' in which the teacher falls, and during one-to-one meetings with the principal or assistant principal goals are developed plans of support put in place, and other administrative protocols are followed to ensure teachers receive clear expectations.. Professional development (PD) is regularly provided, and teachers are given examples of how they could reach their personal professional goals. For example, most teachers professional goals were around instruction (Domain 3), therefore most of the PD has been around on the components of Domain 3. As a result this allows administration to identify specific instructional

needs, design professional development, and monitor a teacher's professional growth in an identified area while providing specific feedback that informs the quality of the work and next steps to improve.

- The principal has established very effective systems for school self-evaluation, review, and modification of practice, with a clear focus on improving student learning. (5.1)
  - As a result of the recommendations from the school's last Quality Review, which stated, "enhance systems for monitoring and evaluating interim and long-term goals so that adjustments can be made in a timely manner", the principal created systems for analyzing student/teacher data. An assessment calendar that lists yearlong formative assessments allows teachers to systematically assess and utilize the results to determine instructional practices. For example, using the first assessment, which was the performance assessment; teachers used the data to form small groups for writing around the qualities of good writing. In a first grade, third grade, and fourth grade classroom, teachers were providing instructions around the qualities of good writing. Additionally, teacher teams use the Circular 6 period for weekly data meetings to look at student data, ongoing scheduled common planning, and weekly data meetings, allows teachers to further review instruction and student work to group students accordingly. The impact is that in every classroom, small group work is happening and every teacher is able to articulate why he or she grouped students in a certain way for instructional purposes. Thus the opportunities that teacher teams and teachers have to meet, to analyze data, review student work, ensures alignment and coherence of curricula and instruction to the Common Core Learning Standards.
  - To enhance the professional learning communities in the school, the principal's creation an Inquiry Team Binder gives teachers information regarding the formation of the team, an Inquiry Timeline, graphic organizers for teams to organize thoughts and plans, and sections for teams to organize research articles, minutes, and notes. This system allows teachers to learn from each other, build confidence that the work they are doing impacts student achievement, and to learn from each other by brainstorming together around a topic that is related to the school goals. Teachers also research together and the team observed had done research around their topic for text evidence. They were providing each other with the information that they each learned. Furthermore, teachers learn how to conduct a cycle of inquiry with one another, how to develop a plan, to implement a task around their goals, and how to analyze that task by doing it together with the protocol that has been set up by the principal that includes implementing a teacher created set of lessons. Another step is to analyze the student work from the set of lessons to observe whether the impact on the students' achievement in that topic area is impacted. Therefore, teachers analyze student work together using the protocols for inquiry teams and adjusting their curriculum based on the analysis. Consequently, meaningful information on instructional practices is disseminated that supports student growth.

## What the school needs to improve

- Provide consistent feedback to students with detailed reasons of their success and clear next steps for improvement based on specific rubrics to help them set and achieve their goals. (2.2)
  - The school is using the Teachers' College Reading and Writing Workshop for literacy. The program includes various assessments such as on-demand and published pieces for every writing unit, running records four times a year, and they also use performance assessments. All assessments guide instruction. Even though the administration along with Network support created writing rubrics that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), there are no such rubrics for all core curriculum areas. This lack of coherence in rubrics prevents providing meaningful information to students, and hinders effective feedback to teacher on their instructional practice impacting informing instruction that allows for fully engaging all students in the learning process.
  - It is the principal's expectations for all teachers to incorporate various strategies for student checks for understanding into lessons. Teachers ask students understanding questions in all subject areas and are responsive to the needs of their students. Students self-assess in math by using the checks for understanding in the program. However, in classes observed, there were various inconsistencies in full implementation, as only the math program has formal checks built into the curriculum. This limits teachers from identifying more granular strengths and needs of students in order to improve learning outcomes.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The School in the Gardens	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>				<b>X</b>			
<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?				<b>X</b>			
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?				<b>X</b>			
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?			<b>X</b>				
<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?				<b>X</b>			
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations?				<b>X</b>			
<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?				<b>X</b>			
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?				<b>X</b>			
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?				<b>X</b>			
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				<b>X</b>			
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?				<b>X</b>			
<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>