

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

P.S. 121

Elementary School Q121

**126-10 109th Avenue
Queens
NY 11420**

Principal: Evelyn Vadi

Dates of review: January 27 - 28, 2014

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

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 121 is an elementary school with 810 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 18% Black, 12% Hispanic, 1% White, 38% American Indian/Alaskan Native and 31% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 9% 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 93.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well-developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students benefit from rigorous instruction that strategically aligns with a standard-based curriculum, resulting in academic growth for all students. (1.1)
 - A review of the school's math data revealed that students needed to deepen their understanding of math concepts. Teacher teams deconstructed the GoMath! program and found the need to explicitly teach how to use math models and focus deeply on only concepts prioritized in the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). The math curriculum now includes more opportunities for students to make sense of problems, make viable arguments, to critique others' reasoning and to participate in small group activities. Lesson plans outlined ways for students to use manipulatives and technology to support student thinking. This was observed in a fifth grade classroom where students were in groups solving a multiplication problem with fractions in different ways. There was adequate time for small group discussion in order to increase students' questioning and discussion skills and gain a deeper understanding of concepts. Kindergarten through grade 2 teacher teams looked at the Wonders Program to determine its alignment to the CCLS and how to explicitly embed close reading of text and building of academic language. Their work resulted in teachers connecting new vocabulary to prior knowledge and using the words meaningfully multiple times in reading and writing. Grades 3-5 teachers found that students need to chunk information in order to reinforce comprehension. The redesign of the instructional framework for all subjects follows a gradual release model that supports student discussion and collaboration, elevating critical thinking skills and improving student performance.
 - Teacher teams across grades developed CCLS-aligned tasks that integrate the instructional shifts, which require students to demonstrate their thinking and provide text-based answers within grade level standards. Teachers provide scaffolds so that all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities, have access to the task and are cognitively engaged. In addition to mind maps, model texts, and graphic organizers, teachers also provide additional text and one-on-one support. All students are evaluated using a CCLS-aligned analytical rubric that is specific to the task. Across the school teachers use routines and scaffolds such as think-pair-share to support student thinking. In a third grade class studying Communities Around the World, groups of students were given either partially completed graphic organizers, teacher-modeled pieces, or student exemplar pieces as guides for developing reading strategies that can be used in new reading situations and add to their knowledge. During the think-pair-share time, each student looked at what they knew about their community, making connections around the big ideas surfaced as a result of reading multiple sources. Students learned how to cite evidence about how communities are alike and discuss how location affects aspects of their community. Teachers discuss and refine discussion routines and appropriate learning scaffolds for all learners, yielding improved instructional practices that result in high levels of student thinking and participation.

- The incorporation of technology-based, differentiated project-based learning provides students with multiple opportunities to undertake research, solve problems and be active learners. (1.2)
 - The principal believes that when students are provided access points to support their learning, they will be able to meet the CCLS. This is evident in the school's professional development plan, where the principal and her team have deepened their work around the competencies of Designing Coherent Instruction, Establishing a Culture for Learning and Engaging Student Learning as enumerated in Danielson's Framework for Teaching. Across the school, teachers integrate technology in their daily lessons. In a 5th grade integrated co-teaching class, students were divided into groups to create a student newspaper based on the Westward Expansion. Students used various resources, including laptops, iPads and a laminated vocabulary chart that contained "old Western language" that students were required to incorporate into their articles. During the research phase, students analyzed varied websites and used the Westward app to find information. This fully embedded use of technology ensures that all students have the tools to engage in the curriculum and produce work products demonstrating content and skill mastery in a manner appropriate for individual students. One grade 4 teacher showed a video demonstrating the relationship between the Native Americans and the Dutch colonists to provide students with a visual representation of the content matter and then asked the students to draw inferences about the relationship between the two. As a whole, teachers have utilized the story-mapping tool in the Wonders Program to support students in the process of breaking down a story in order to think, write and talk about text, and visually organize information. One student stated, "I love being able to use technology in my classroom. It helps me organize my thoughts to share with my partner."
 - Across the school, teachers express that students learn best through lessons that embed multiple entry points, enabling students to have access to a standards-based curricula. Teachers' beliefs are informed by ongoing discussions and monitoring by the Instructional Cabinet, which consists of teachers and administration. Across the school, teachers plan and use varied forms of front-end scaffolds such as providing a purpose for reading, pre-teaching critical vocabulary and incorporating visual aids in order to support all types of learners. Teachers' lesson plans show how they incorporate media to tap and build into learners' interests. In grades 4 and 5, teachers provided task cards and anchor charts to students working in small groups in order to reinforce expectations. Teachers also provide special education students with graphic organizers either partially completed or have enumerated questions that helps them complete their tasks. English language learners are exposed to academic vocabulary with pictures to support them. As a result, student learning groups, classroom settings and teachers' lessons reflect careful thought regarding the individual needs of students, creating a consistent instructional focus school-wide. All students observed were able to actively engage in discussion. Similarly, writing projects on content such as westward expansion and "When Three Worlds Meet" showed these scaffolds assisting them in their writing of informational text.
- The principal is proactive in identifying additional funding sources as well as making informed and effective organizational decisions across all aspects of the school to support improvements in learning. (1.3)

- Based on the recommendations of the previous Quality Review that recommended the school use technology further to enhance teaching and learning, the principal made acquiring technology a priority. Through various funding sources, every classroom has a Promethean Board, a document camera, and a laptop with the ActivInspire Program to support teacher work on the Promethean Board, as well as five laptops and five iPads for students to use during group activities, final projects and presentations. These learning tools allow the classroom teacher to reach a large number of diverse learners, encourages all students to be engaged in classroom activities and creates an environment that allows students to be active participants in the learning process. Several classrooms have the ActiVote system, where students can instantly respond to questions, giving teachers a quick check for understanding. Apple TV is in every classroom for teachers to show visuals and videos from their iPads. For example, during an inquiry team meeting, a second grade teacher showed how students incorporated the “Eight Wonder Words” during a related Pictionary classroom activity. Apple TV has also allowed the school to integrate iTunes University, a digital database of educational units that combines content area literature with visuals. A new computer lab helps to bridge the digital gap between the school and home. The principal purchased a plethora of computer programs for enrichment, remediation and research and then facilitated monthly professional development workshops. These programs include the myON, a database that gives students access to a digital library of books, BrainPop and Starfall, which provide students with a video tutorial of content and higher order thinking activities. BrainPop is also compatible with ActiVote and, thus, additional student engagement. The principal also videotapes teachers to share best practices during faculty conferences. The positive impact of this increase in technology on improved teaching and learning is demonstrated in student work products, such as student writing that shows the use of academic language, direct quotes and citations.

- Due to expert organizational practices, staff time is optimized so that grade level teachers are able to meet monthly to make adjustments to the curriculum and instruction and teachers hold themselves accountable for student growth. The school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) calls for improvement in reading, leading the school to assign teacher leaders who have expertise in literacy to share best practices around planning engaging literacy lessons to all relevant subgroups. In addition, cluster teachers push into integrated co-teaching classes and team-teach based on their content areas. The principal scheduled built-in supports for cluster teachers to meet with small groups of students during their preparation time so that students are not removed during instructional time. The principal arranged for student clubs to meet during the daily schedule so that grade 4 and 5 students can participate in visual arts and drama. This scheduling provides intervention enrichment services with a smaller teacher-to-student ratio, resulting in accelerated progress for all subgroups of students as evidenced by the Response-to-Intervention data, teacher made assessments and end of unit learning projects.

- Administrators and teachers effectively use a wide range of assessment data to monitor school-level needs, student progress, plan instruction and create successful intervention strategies when needed. (2.2)
 - The school uses analytical rubrics that are standards-based. The school has adopted the use of Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products rubrics, which provide the criteria to determine student work’s quality and

alignment to the CCLS and provide constructive criteria based feedback to students. The Administration reviews and provides feedback on the rubrics, such as recommending that teachers unpack standards and identify the student work habits necessary for grade appropriate standards-based work. For example, in one of the assignments reviewed, the student was provided with a checklist and a rubric, which she used to self-assess and identify her areas of strength and areas for improvement. Teachers use the performance tasks from Wonders and GoMath! to identify the needs of students and to craft instruction targets to address these needs, which enables them to make instructional decisions geared to improve performance and accelerate growth. An instructional decision that came out of the assessments conducted in the fall led to a review process of the school-wide focus on the instructional shifts in math of fluency. The administrative team organized the school to allow for fluency activities such as a Mathematics Bee in kindergarten through grade 2 and a Multiplication Bee in grades 3-5. Vertical teams created a fluency toolbox identifying required fluencies for each grade. The administration, along with the parent coordinator and teachers, conducted specialized workshops for parents to interpret the fluencies and CCLS.

- Teacher teams regularly analyze baseline assessments for students they share in an effort to improve teacher practice and adjust curricula. The outcome of these conversations is shared with staff and parents. When student benchmarks come in, the principal meets with each classroom teacher to see how their students did in comparison to earlier scores. The principal created a spreadsheet where she enters student test results and the related standard to identify gaps. As a result, the school has focused on building the math shift of fluency. Vertical teams created a list of the fluencies expected to be mastered at each grade level. Similarly, the school focused on building the shift of vocabulary to support students in citing evidence and using domain specific vocabulary in their arguments for both literacy and math. This has had a direct impact on students with disabilities and English language learners as evidenced by students being able to defend their opinions through the use of a routine called "I Used to Think...and Now I Think..." which promotes reflection on how and why thinking has changed. Teachers can then make effective instructional decisions to improve student performance.
- Teachers benefit from professional collaborations that foster reflection and provide options for researching effective instructional techniques. (4.2)
 - There are two types of teacher teams at the school: inquiry teams and grade teams, which meet several times each month. Inquiry teams focus on students' use of academic vocabulary following the research of Marzano, and they consist of a teacher from each grade. During inquiry team meetings, led by the data specialist, the item analysis from the English language arts test, was reviewed for deficiencies within each grade and across grades. The standards that students were most deficient in require students to draw upon a foundation of knowledge in social studies and science. The team determined that increasing student vocabulary and exposure to nonfiction texts would provide students with more background knowledge to become better readers, thus improving their ability to comprehend text. For example, at the grade 3 teacher team meeting, teachers examined the item analysis of a current Schoolnet math assessment to identify both class and individual strengths and deficiencies, develop a plan of action for addressing those deficiencies and the scaffold they would use to differentiate instruction. As a result, scaffolds such as hint cards were developed to help all learners, and in particular English

language learners and students with disabilities, become "unstuck". The grade team leader is responsible for facilitating the meeting and reflecting on next steps. Having these two teams results in cohesive planning and high level of teacher accountability, as evidenced through students being able to use domain specific vocabulary in their writing. Teachers of English language learners and teaching assistants push in to the English language arts or math block, teaching in stations to unpack and deconstruct complex text or multiple step math word problems. During the student interview, students were able to share how they use content specific vocabulary in their writing.

- Based on last year's Progress Report where the school received 1.3 out of 17 Closing the Achievement Gap points, the principal told teachers to identify their "Fab 5" students: one top, two middle and two struggling students. When meeting in meetings teachers can look and analyze these students' work and provide a fair analysis of the range of learners in their classes. This was evident at the Inquiry Team meeting where teachers were discussing their implementation of the sixth step of Marzano's "6 Steps to Effective Vocabulary Instruction," the inquiry focus this year, and sharing their "Fab 5" work. Grade level teacher teams use data gathered from the Fab 5 to plan and adjust curriculum and teaching strategies for small group and individual instruction. For example, the third grade teacher team has implemented Marzano's 6 Steps and Mind Maps in content areas. These practices have resulted in 90% of kindergarten through grade 2 students showing an increase in their Fountas and Pinnell reading levels and 70% of students in grades 3-5 showing an increase in their reading level from the September to January. The results from the Fountas and Pinnell assessments indicated that 90% of the "Fab 5" students showed an increase in their reading levels, which is a direct result of the school-wide instructional focus. These gains reflect the coherence and consistency throughout the school and highlight the reflective, collaborative community that focuses on improving learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Initiate a collaborative approach across all constituent groups in setting goals based on benchmark data with an eye to raising student achievement. (3.1)
 - The school uses a data driven approach, using data from the state assessments and the baseline assessments to inform its goals and decisions in the CEP. Parent participation in the process is limited to parent members of the School Leadership Team. The principal and her instructional team established 4 benchmark periods where student data such as baseline, mid-unit of studies, end of unit studies and benchmarking data are reviewed to make strategic decisions about the instructional core as well as looking how these goals affect students' social-emotional growth. These goals are tracked but the results do not effectively inform changes to curricula and practice, leading to missed opportunities for improved instruction and student achievement. Also, the goals are not communicated to parents on an ongoing basis, resulting in pockets of confusion in knowing where the school is in reaching its goals.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Elementary School 121	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							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed