

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Abigail Adams School

Elementary School 131

**170 – 45 84 Avenue
Queens
NY 11432**

Principal: Randolph A. Ford

Dates of review: December 9 – 10, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Lenon C. Murray

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Abigail Adams School is an elementary school with 840 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 9% Black, 11% Hispanic, 5% White, and 75% Asian students. The student body includes 22% English language learners and 4% 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 95.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school curriculum offers frequent opportunities for students to engage in rigorous academic tasks to produce meaningful work products aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). (1.1)
 - The school leadership and teacher teams work in collaboration with trainers from Teachers College and their network to align the curriculum to meet students' needs. They approach curriculum design from a shared belief that their efforts should focus on what is working in their classrooms rather than be swayed by publisher presentations that remain unproven. The faculty uses the CCLS as an anchor from which to focus on essential texts, and they decided to refine both math and literacy skills through wrestling with problem solving and nonfiction writing, a decision that emerged from unpacking the standards in teacher team meetings. Teachers devise their own units of study through the year and use published texts as references. This rigorous and persistent curricular effort has resulted in strong curriculum scaffolding and alignment across all grades and content areas. For example, it stimulates students' writing stamina and has increased the volume of student writing as evidenced in student notebooks and portfolios. It also promotes college and career readiness for all students by inculcating sound writing approaches.
 - Teachers use the large volume of student work, including writing and baseline assessments that are aligned to CCLS, to identify patterns and trends both vertically and horizontally. This enables the teaching staff to target areas of need and gaps in teacher practice and curricular refinement. Identified areas include text-based persuasive writing, student-generated higher order questions and clarity of written math reflections. This strategic planning and curricular adjustment emphatically includes a focus on special education students and English language learners. For example, English language learners and special education students benefit from sentence starters, parallel texts, picture cues and graphic organizers as potential entry points. All teachers have access to school-wide curricula including academic tasks and challenging assignments. These assignments include developing logical arguments based on textual evidence and drawing conclusions that are implicit in a complex text. This consistent analysis of the standards and focus on content has led to improvements across grades as indicated in recently administered literacy and math benchmark assessments.
- Teacher pedagogy, based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching, is focused on meeting individual student needs through meaningful learning tasks that maximize student engagement. (1.2)
 - The classroom learning environments from kindergarten through grade five are structured in a student-centered manner. Student-initiated inquiry and robust group discussions promote metacognition, reflection and a deep curiosity for learning. Multiple entry points are explicitly generated through activities like tiered tasks, visual cues, web-based exercises, graphic organizers, rubrics and even checklists. Teachers use the

Danielson Framework as a foundation for their beliefs about how their students learn and how they can improve their teaching. This includes high-level questioning that promotes critical thinking. Students have become adept at discussing their work with each other and using text-based evidence to support their claims and opinions. For example, in a second grade math class a student explained an alternate method of solving a word problem that was not included in the mini-lesson. The teacher said, "As long as your method works consistently for you, feel free to use it!" In a fifth grade class that was learning about the Civil War, students were expected to use evidence from their reading in their arguments about whether more soldiers died from battle or from disease and unsanitary conditions. In a fourth grade class students were working in groups using various methodologies to determine the most efficient ways to identify factors of a prime or composite number. Certain students had additional access to manipulative symbols or guiding questions to help them achieve understanding. Student interaction demonstrated the mastery of academic vocabulary and productive wrestling with challenging mathematical concepts. These school-wide academic expectations have resulted in students who are consistently and actively engaged in their learning as demonstrated in the high-quality student work displayed in the hallways and classrooms.

- The principal's proactive, strategic approach to making informed and effective organizational decisions supports student learning, leading to strong improvements in student writing and research skills.(1.3)
 - The principal uses his resources very effectively around the professional development goals within the school that focus on full alignment to CCLS and the new teacher evaluation system. The long term plan is to develop a strong faculty that uses peer and self evaluation as their main means of improvement. Consultants from the network and Teachers College work with teacher teams on a weekly basis as they adjust curricula to target individual student needs. SmartBoards are used in classrooms, the science lab has been upgraded and English language learners use the computer lab for Imagine Learning, a software program to enhance literacy that is tailored to their actual performance levels. The principal has worked with a local politician to secure funding that continuously upgrades the technological capabilities of the school. A partnership with St. John's University provides a steady contingent of student teachers who greatly support the academic intervention program in classrooms. A certified English as a Second Language teacher has been hired for each grade and these six teachers work a coordinated push-in/pull-out program. As a result, 80% of English language learners test out of the program within three years.
 - The school is purposefully organized to encourage teachers to meet up to three times each week to engage in collaborative work around the instructional goals of the school. Teams are organized by grades with designated leaders, even though roles are rotated on a regular basis. All teams use similar protocols while delving deeply into student work, assessment data and Response to Intervention (RTI) evidence. This teaming arrangement and the intense work that emanates from it weekly has resulted in improved instruction around challenging tasks as evidenced in student reflection notebooks compared to the previous year.

This improved instruction includes shared reading activities and “Think Aloud” techniques to make teacher reasoning more visible to students.

- The school leaders and faculty continuously analyze and refine their assessments and rubrics to align with strong curricula and accurately inform instructional decisions and measure student outcomes. (2.2)
 - The school uses pre-, mid- and post-unit assessments to monitor student comprehension and mastery within the CCLS-aligned units of study. Teachers modify and refine these units based on student data and engagement in the classroom. The new math curriculum is a natural extension to the connected math program that the school has used for several years. The English language arts program builds on years of mini-lessons and cumulative in-house data to refine literacy across subject areas. This is particularly true for special education students and English language learners. For example, a school wide study of unit assessments and student work aligned to the CCLS led to strategies for increasing comprehension and building strong academic vocabulary. In a first grade class, an English as a second language teacher doing a whole class lesson led students in an exploration of basic research methods. As a result, English language learners showed a 13% increase in comprehension as measured by running records.
 - The vast majority of teachers use rubrics daily and essential questions in conjunction with their lessons. These questions are often utilized as checks for understanding as students are working in their groups or independently. Teachers use students’ responses during lessons to guide the re-teaching concepts or to inform adjustments in the active engagement. Teachers adapt the share-out towards the end of lessons to ask for clarification and elaboration from students. Student reflections on lessons are practiced even in the early elementary grades and provide all students with multiple opportunities to self-assess. This consistent approach has led to a majority of students across grades being able to articulate their next learning steps. This was evident in reviewer discussions with students in their classrooms and through examination of student workbooks.
- School leaders effectively use the Danielson Framework for Teaching to evaluate teaching and learning outcomes that support the instructional vision through teacher growth. (4.1)
 - School administrators and teacher leaders at the school work diligently with the entire staff to develop a shared understanding of the instructional expectations expressed in the Danielson Rubric. They accomplish this through patient discussion and norming exercises during faculty and grade meetings and in individual consultations. The school leaders use their frequent formal and informal observations to provide individualized next steps to teachers with precise feedback based on low-inference data. For example, the principal indicated to a first grade teacher that she may consider increasing her wait time after questions to encourage students to think more deeply. Teachers voluntarily shared their professional goals at their initial planning conferences with their administrators. The attainment of professional classroom goals is a collaborative endeavor between leadership and the faculty. Additionally,

student data is used to verify the effectiveness of any teaching strategies that teacher teams have added to their repertoire. The principal remains very sensitive to the expressed needs of teachers and aligns professional development to support teacher development. Guided reading is a crucial skill for struggling readers on which trainers have recently focused. Both current assistant principals were formerly teachers and coaches at the school. As a result, teachers on teacher teams state that they have identified evidence of changes in pedagogy such as making their thinking more visible to students from these embedded practices.

What the school needs to improve

- Enhance the school-wide evaluation systems to facilitate the speed and impact of school-level decisions as the administrators and teachers fully integrate the CCLS into the curricula. (5.1)
 - School leaders fully support evaluation systems in the school which are monitored by the assistant principals. The assistant principals receive agendas, minutes, completed units of study and pacing from teacher teams. The school adjusts the cluster schedule in response to the needs of special education students and English language learners by increasing lab time, for example. The high expectations that are distilled in the school culture are refined by parental feedback. However, the school leaders are among the few persons in the building who can explicitly describe this robust process. Regular evaluation from the feedback loop is evident in the careful attention paid to curricula. Adjustments in direct response to student needs as a consequence are harder to identify. As a result, the other constituencies in the learning community tend to wait for direction from leadership, thus needlessly slowing the process of adapting new initiatives.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Abigail Adams School	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