

# Quality Review Report

## 2013-2014

**The Langston Hughes School**

**Elementary School Q134**

**203-06 109<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11412**

**Principal: Robert A. Chambers**

**Dates of review: February 10 – 11, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Lenon C. Murray**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Langston Hughes School is an elementary school with 509 students from pre-kindergarten through grade five. The school population comprises 87% Black, 8% Hispanic, 1% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 91.8%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school has a rigorous curriculum aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) that incorporates higher order skills across all grades while engaging learners in tasks that advance critical thinking. (1.1)
  - School leaders and faculty work continuously towards the alignment of all instruction to meet the demands of the CCLS across all grades and content areas. They determined that more student work products were necessary to demonstrate students' increasing understanding of informational texts across content areas and text-based responses in their writing and discussions. Even though they followed the recommendation of using GoMath! for their math program, they remained with a reading program, Reading Wonders, to which they were already accustomed. The school believes that this program is more closely aligned to CCLS with its tasks than other reading curricula. Teacher teams meet regularly to plan CCLS-aligned units for social studies and science. The instructional shifts are systematically incorporated, particularly in literacy and math. Literacy is embedded across all disciplines in units that include complex text, language and academic vocabulary, close reading of texts and performance tasks. As a result, curricular frameworks and scope and sequence models in addition to pacing calendars show evidence of preparation of students for college and career readiness. The scope and sequence models include challenging tasks that build on the skills of writing and speaking from text-based evidence while defending a position.
  - The school leaders noticed weak writing trends in the primary grades and selected an explicit writing program to provide structure and focus. The first to third grade teachers analyzed and discussed student work and areas for continued growth, and as a result they adjusted instruction to address quality and stamina across subjects and across grades. For example, teachers use a variety of strategies to teach writing traits such as methods to create topic sentences, sentence framing, partnership brainstorming, utilizing vocabulary in context, and free writing that they try in their classrooms and discuss at subsequent meetings. English language learners and special education students have entry points that are tagged to the rigor and critical thinking skills expected of all students. As a result, student notebooks, portfolios and displayed work indicate that standards-based writing is now a large part of student output.
- The school's faculty has a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best so that across content areas questioning and routines generate meaningful work products and deep discussion. (1.2)
  - The school believes that students learn best when they are fully engaged, challenged and feel comfortable to take risks. They believe that the Danielson Framework for Teaching supports this approach. Across classrooms the teachers use a hybrid workshop approach that includes active discussion and small group tutoring where needed. Teachers use their conferring notes and other student classroom data to create their

flexible groups. Teacher teams structure lessons across grades that include on, below and above grade level entry points to reach all students including English language learners and special education students. For example, during visits to a third and then a fifth grade classroom, students worked in groups discussing selected topics and preparing for writing. Graphic organizers, Venn diagrams, and large charts offered multiple ways for students to remain involved. As a result, student data shows increased higher-order thinking skills in reading and math as evidenced in student portfolios, unit tests and benchmark assessments.

- Individual teachers and teams thoughtfully use a wide range of data to meet the needs of students and adjust instruction to ensure meaningful learning opportunities for all children. (2.2)
  - The school uses the unit assessments that are embedded in the curricular materials that they currently use, including pre-, mid- and post-unit assessments, to identify what students know and are able to do. Teachers design rubrics by grade and by assignment. For example, the fifth grade teachers continuously examine their assessments to determine levels of rigor and ensure that they are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. The rubric used for writing assessments is compared to the standard to ensure that it requires clear expression of ideas, correct grammar and authentic voice. Assessment data provides clear evidence of individual student and student subgroup performance. The benchmark assessments provide the school with detailed information on student progress through the year. The school has determined that the level of student writing was inadequate to the challenge of the Common Core. The teachers used writing rubrics that were aligned to the standards. After procuring and implementing a writing program school-wide, teachers used individual conferencing and coaching into student practice to secure improvement. The supervisors used the program to explain the content they expected students to learn. The teachers in turn provided students with clear expectations for sentence structure, using text-based evidence and writing with the reader in mind. Students are then able to apply the instruction immediately to their work. This has resulted in increases in both volume and stamina across grades and subgroups as evidenced in student portfolios.
- The school's observation and feedback protocols are aligned to the Danielson Framework and provide teachers with next steps and clear expectations that are enhancing school-wide practice. (4.1)
  - The school leaders have fully adopted the Danielson Framework for Teaching this year. They met with each of their teachers at the beginning of the year and they provide both verbal and written feedback following their frequent cycles of observations. Written student work is an essential part of evaluating the success of the lessons. For newer teachers, the principal emphasizes designing coherent instruction, questioning and discussion, engaging students in learning and establishing a culture for learning. Professional development is designed based on teacher goals and the trends that are distilled from the observation protocols. Earlier in the school year there were vigorous discussions between the administration and the faculty as the norms and expectations were established. Teachers have subsequently been involved in the analysis of

their own low-inference observation data as they take ownership of their improvement. The principal uses this information to decide on tenure or extensions for teachers. For example, a teacher who was opposed to the proposed extension signed the agreement when his observations were discussed through the lens of the Danielson rubric. As a result, teachers are increasingly aware of their next steps and can request tailored support to promote their professional growth.

- The utilization of the Danielson Framework for Teaching has more precisely defined teacher strengths, challenges and next steps and the feedback provided serves as a catalyst for a cycle of continuous improvement. The process includes a constant reference to the rubric to evaluate all aspects of teaching and learning. Classroom intervisitations and learning walkthroughs contribute directly to the rapid implementation of suggested recommendations. For example, the leaders suggested to an early grade teacher that she plan and compose her essential questions ahead of the lesson so they could be aligned with levels three and four of the Depth of Knowledge chart. Teachers use team meeting time and grade meetings to refine their collaboration and deepen their understanding. For example, the fourth grade teacher team described the value of working together to master a new teacher evaluation system and a new curriculum simultaneously. As a result, teachers receive multiple opportunities to develop and speak a common professional language.

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

- Enhance the strategic administrative decisions that support the school's instructional goals to meet students' learning needs in order to improve performance. (1.3)
  - Teacher teams are scheduled to meet twice a week to facilitate inquiry, adjust curricular materials, plan lessons and analyze student work. Teachers use this time to collaborate on deepening their expertise on the new curricula that arrived this year. The school has expanded the use of Smart Boards and laptops have been disbursed to faculty and staff in the building. The school made the decision to utilize GoMath!, Reading Wonders and Traits Writing to support the academic needs of the school. However, the resources of the school proved inadequate to procure materials in sufficient abundance for all the grades at the same time. This has resulted in uneven distribution among the grades and has put some teacher teams under increased pressure to do more with less, leading a slower improvement in student performance in some of the grade levels. Teachers meet weekly to discuss student work and plan lessons aligned to the CCLS. However, teachers remain reluctant to change the pre-published material at the same time that they are mastering it. As a result, the challenging academic tasks were taken directly from the books with little teacher input, leading to missed opportunities to more carefully tailor work to meet students' needs.
- Provide more of the necessary supports and tools to students and families in order to more actively engage them in the process of meeting school-wide goals and expectations.(3.4)

- The school leaders work with the Teacher Effectiveness coach to communicate the high expectations of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The network collaborates with the school to provide professional development and unpack the rubric for the faculty. High expectations are conveyed through the daily electronic message, monthly faculty conferences and weekly grade planning meetings. Teacher leaders meet regularly with administrators to discuss the issues that arise at teacher team meetings. These teacher teams contribute directly to the culture for learning that thrives at the school. However, anxiety exists among staff about their ratings and this leads to an aversion to risks and creativity in teaching. The guidance counselor and the school-based support team offer feedback and direction to students in preparation for the next level. However, parents are unclear about the opportunities in the new district middle school choice program and believe that the school is slow to respond to their queries. This has led to insufficient scaffolding to families to achieve the highest expectations of maximizing individual achievement and entering middle schools that support their aptitudes and interests.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Langston Hughes Elementary 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>