

Quality Review Report

2013-2014

The Pomonok School & STAR Academy

Elementary-Middle School 200

**70-10 164th STREET
QUEENS
NY, 11365**

Principal: KEVIN MCAULIFFE

**Dates of review: April 24 - 25, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Danielle DiMango**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Pomonok School & STAR Academy is an elementary-middle school with 474 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 25% Black, 41% Hispanic, 19% White, and 15% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 92.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has engaged in deep curricular work to ensure key standards and the instructional shifts align with units and tasks and it uses student work samples to inform planning to meet needs of students and improve outcomes. (1.1)
 - Curriculum maps across kindergarten through grade 8 and in all content areas are rooted in Understanding by Design ideology and include three stages. Stage one focuses on desired results where Common Core Learning Standards are linked to enduring understandings. Stage two includes assessment evidence of performance tasks and school wide and classroom based tools, and Stage three focuses on learning plans, activities, and resources. This year, in particular, across the school teachers focused on understanding the balance of skills, practice and content to deepen student understanding of the standards. Additionally, access points are targeted in all maps that include supports for at-risk students and English language learners as well as enrichment activities. Teachers formed an understanding of Ready Gen, Expeditionary learning, CMP3, and Go Math, and use data and student work to drive decision making that has built capacity moving the focus from being critical users of programs to creating a curriculum that promotes college and career readiness for all learners. For example, math teachers in grade 4, using Go Math as a base program and online resources and Everyday Math as supports to fill curricula gaps developed units divided into four critical areas of focus required within the Common Core Learning Standards. Resources are directly aligned to standards and design embeds an inquiry-based approach where students are asked to construct understanding through problem solving in real world context and defending the thinking process. As a result of this comprehensive work in understanding and mapping curricula, students have coherent exposure to the standards within and across grades leading to improvements in student work products as evident in student tasks and school-based assessments.
 - Within curriculum maps throughout the school, tasks are developed to include a balance between problem solving, use of evidence to support learning, and higher-order skills to best advance students to the next level. Staff consistently uses student work from prior units to modify and build tasks with aligned lessons and activities for the next unit. For example, during one team meeting, English teachers were planning student entry tasks as well as tasks around chapter bands from the novel *Lyddie* by Katherine Patterson. They were using skills and strategies from the curriculum guide and infusing writing standards, such as effective use of claim and counter claim, as student data indicated this to still be an area of focus. Additionally, the team was incorporating strategies from the Writing Revolution, an intervention program for writing, into the maps and task design in order to support struggling students and English language learners in completion of the tasks. As a result of this consistent analysis of standards, content, student work, and data streams, to ensure critical understanding and application of learning across all grade and content areas, curriculum, and tasks coherently provide access for all students so they are suitably challenged.

- The principal's strategic use of resources and organization of staff time allows for effective collaboration and supports instructional goals leading to improved student work products. (1.3)
 - There is transparency in the way resources are directly aligned to the school wide goals of improving the instructional core. For example, funding is set aside for intervention support sessions on Saturdays, hiring of additional staff to provide at risk and small group instruction, and the purchase of additional resources such as magazine subscriptions, word study supports, and online programs such as Imagine Learning. Additionally, in support of 21st century learning, the principal has purchased computers, iPads, and document cameras, to support the delivery of and student engagement in instruction and academic discourse in classrooms. Finally, the principal has worked diligently to develop partnerships with community based organizations to offer after school tutoring as well as programs such as dance and Cook Shop during the school day. As a result of these efforts and student access to a variety of resources, students are demonstrating improvements in explaining their work in math and the use of text-based evidence throughout their writing tasks. Additionally, 61% of students in the bottom third school wide are showing gains in reading comprehension skills.
 - In order to support the professional growth of teachers, the principal has scheduled opportunities for them to meet three times a week in grade level and vertical teams in addition to a 50-minute inquiry period. He has also set aside funding for all teachers to engage in curricula work this year. Additionally, teachers meet twice a month as literacy and math teams with the focus around school wide goals of raising rigor of tasks and improving instructional practice. All teams are studying the expectations of the new curriculum, looking closely at data, and are collaborating around pedagogical modifications necessary to target the high demands of the curricula in order to best support their students. As a result, teachers have developed and implemented engaging standards-based tasks that demonstrate student mastery of standards in student portfolios throughout the school.
- The principal's clear vision of building a positive school culture and safe environment has been embraced by the school community resulting in academic and personal growth of students. (1.4)
 - In order to address chronic absenteeism within the school an attendance team and mentorship program, which include over 20 staff members, support monitoring of attendance. Every week students chart their class attendance rates and once a month the adults in the building engage in a celebration of the classes with the best attendance. The Success Mentors program assigns staff members throughout the building to students who are consistently absent from school. Adults work with these students and their families to support changes to school attendance habits and remove triggers and barriers leading to absences. As a result of these initiatives, students say they have a reason to come to school and feel supported by adults in the building. Additionally there has been an increase of 1.16% in overall student attendance school wide and a decrease of 9% of chronic absenteeism this school year.
 - The principal has offered a variety of supports to staff around setting a positive classroom environment and school culture and therefore all members of the community ensure that students benefit from ongoing

social and emotional supports. For example, staff members are running events and clubs such as student government, the ROAR club around supporting animal rescue, anti-bullying and school spirit assemblies, a positive behavioral program in the school known as SPOT includes incentives that offer tickets and rewards for good behaviors and staff/student sporting events such as teacher/student basketball games. The principal worked to bridge relationships between the elementary and middle school by instituting a morning lineup to gather the school together each morning to begin the day and a battle of the classes where middle school classes teamed up with the younger students to engage in a fun-filled week designed to boost student morale before State testing, promote spirited teamwork, and build relationships and class buddies. Parents note the principal is building a culture of respect for learning and of relationships encouraging a warm and supportive environment for their children. As a result, students are very excited to be part of their school community and school data reveals a 71% decrease in suspensions this year.

- Frequent and effective feedback to teachers supports clear expectations and is improving pedagogy. (4.1)
 - The principal has triangulated observation, feedback, and professional learning opportunities that communicate clear expectations of instruction and highlight strengths and areas for improvement that are understood and appreciated by teachers. He visits classrooms on a daily basis and provides timely written and verbal feedback aligned to the Danielson Framework and student work observed during visits. His collaborative style and clarity of what good instruction should look like has led to teacher partnerships and sharing of resources throughout the school. For example, weekly messages are sent to staff communicating instructional strengths and highlighting highly effective teacher practice and resources observed throughout the school. Teachers are asked to reflect on their own practice and are provided with tools and strategies, such as supports to rethink flow of the day, strategies to encourage academic discourse, and tools that encourage questioning and thinking skills. These supports are clearly aligned to the Danielson framework and teachers say they find them useful in their classrooms as well as discussion prompts during teacher team meetings. Additionally, the principal uses Teachboost and ADVANCE to capture and analyze instructional trends and plans and modifies the school professional development calendar based on teacher need. This systematic analysis and support cycle is providing teachers with a common understanding of expectations of high quality instruction, and next steps are leading to deep reflection around modifications to teacher practice that consistently align to the rigor of the curriculum.

What the school needs to improve

- Further support teachers to improve skills around high level questioning and instructional decision making to provide purposeful entry points that will offer appropriate support and challenge to maximize student engagement. (1.2)
 - The principal sets clear expectations and offers high quality professional development to support improving teacher practice and some teachers are engaging in high-level pedagogical practice such as effective parallel and station teaching with aligned supports and extensions for all learners. However, evidence of practice across most classrooms did not support the consistent use of high order questioning skills or effective entry points to provide access for all learners. Across classrooms, evidence of scaffolds

for struggling students or English language learners was sporadic leading to lack of understanding of rigorous content or student inability to explain the purpose of their learning. In addition, some classrooms required all students to complete the same task in the same way hindering student ability to fully engage in their learning, to produce meaningful work products, and to demonstrate growth towards meeting the standards.

- It is a school wide expectation that instruction supports the value that students learn best through being active learners and engaging in academic discourse. The principal states the school is working towards building upon this understanding to include intellectual engagement. However, while evidence exists across classrooms that students are encouraged to engage in text-based discussions and to support their reasoning in math, some classroom discussions or student tasks are not aligned to the rigor of the curriculum nor do they require students to demonstrate higher order thinking. For example, in one classroom, although students were working in groups and asked to make inferences across a variety of topics, task design only required them to summarize a reading passage in the textbook, limiting students from engaging in deep discussion and analysis of content. In other rooms, while students were challenged to give their opinions of a topic, questions and prompts did not cognitively engage students to make comparisons across genres as intended in the curriculum. These teaching practices result in uneven levels of challenge and understanding of content throughout the school.
- Deepen the work of aligning assessment practices and rubrics so teachers effectively gauge the impact of curricular and instructional decisions and students are aware of their next steps to improve learning outcomes. (2.2)
 - The school has engaged in very strong work around math assessments and use of rubrics in math that allow for opportunities for students to assess their learning needs and to identify next steps. However, these practices are not fully developed in other content areas. Additionally, the current language of rubrics in some grades such as kindergarten and at the middle school level is above student understanding of the expectations of the task or standard, and even though rubrics are used consistently throughout the school, some do not emphasize skills or scaffold across grades to convey alignment to the standards. For example, in reviewing student writing of the same genre in grades 4 and 5, there were clear inconsistencies in rigor, expectations, and alignment of criteria, to the standards. Consequently, some students are unable to clearly articulate their progress or know what they need in terms of support or what to do to get to the next level.
 - The school is consistent in the use of common assessments such as pre- and post-tests and writing tasks aligned to the curricula programs. It also analyzes these tools during team meetings to determine gaps in curriculum and student learning. However, individual teachers inconsistently use the data streams coupled with ongoing checks for understanding for instructional planning. In some classrooms, there was evidence that teachers used tools such as school wide data, tasks and exit slips to intentionally plan activities to deepen student understanding of content. In other classrooms, although data was used to group students, it is not sufficiently used to plan tasks aligned to student-learning needs to guide them in achieving mastery of standards. Thus, some classrooms do not have accurate measures of student growth to ensure positive student outcomes.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Pomonok School & STAR Academy	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