

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

The Discovery School for Inquiry and Research

Elementary 25Q201

**65-11 155 STREET
QUEENS
NY, 11367**

Principal: Rebecca Lozada

**Dates of review: Jan 23-24, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Danielle DiMango**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Discovery School for Inquiry and Research is an Elementary school with 454 students from PK through grade 5. The school population comprises 42% Black, 36% Hispanic, 5% White, and 16% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 92.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well-developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Strategic school wide analysis ensures the school curricula scaffolds within and across grades and aligns effectively to Common Core learning standards and instructional shifts that target the learning needs of students. (1.1)
 - The school has worked with Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project for eight years and is in year two of the Envisions math program. Each year, in response and direct alignment to student academic needs revealed within state and school based assessments, the administration and teacher teams have made deliberate adjustments to the curricula in order to more effectively isolate and adjust gaps identified within all content area curriculum maps. To maintain alignment to the standards and the instructional shifts and coherence within and across grades, school leaders and teachers use standardized practices to determine areas for growth culled from data trends including student work. Once students' strengths and weaknesses are identified, teachers develop action plans and modify curriculum, anticipate impact of curricula changes on student learning and create targeted tasks to monitor student growth in focused areas. For example, this year English language arts data uncovered student difficulty staying grounded in text, identifying relevant information, demonstrating understanding of explicit text, determining the meaning of general academic and domain specific vocabulary, determining main idea and describing depth of character. Specific curricula changes within maps to target these areas include, focus on close reading of text, enriched word work and infusion of Shades of Meaning to increase student understanding of vocabulary. The school has increased opportunities for second grade students to interact with a variety of genres, shifting of personal narrative and informative writing within the school year, redefining tasks across grades to promote better quality text based answers and details, use of paired passages and incorporating literacy standards and instructional shifts into the content areas across grades using interdisciplinary themes to incorporate local and global topics. In math, the school identified a need to restructure maps to address student misconceptions between skill based practices and content. These gaps were targeted through increased focus on content vocabulary, ensuring units of study clearly identify and assess grade math standards, providing opportunities for students to model with mathematics, redesigning tasks for better CCLS alignment and addressing focus and fluency shifts. This emphasis on curricula has ensured coherence throughout the school and both assessment data and student writing and math task outcomes demonstrate student growth in critical needs areas.
 - As part of the curricula design and modification process, tasks are planned to provide all students with access to the curriculum and require that they demonstrate deep higher- order thinking. In every classroom, students have access to curricula aligned strategic charts, check lists, grade appropriate conversation prompts and question stems, inquiry boards, mentor texts, vocabulary supports, manipulatives and problem solving planning grids. These focused curricula tools are yielding increased student outcomes for struggling learners as evidenced in student work portfolios and school wide math and literacy assessments.

- The principal's thoughtful school organization and effective use of resources and community partnerships supports school wide instructional goals and the learning needs of students. (1.3)
 - In support of school wide goals of increasing student learning outcomes and building a strong community culture, the principal strategically aligns budget, technology and partnerships to ensure students are nurtured and well supported in their learning. To develop skills required of 21st century learners, the school has a full time technology program and school lab where curriculum and student work products are maintained in "techfolios" and directly aligned to curriculum in all content areas. Additionally, SMART boards and computer carts are available for use in the classroom and support the individualized software and web based programs, such as Spatial Temporal Math games the school uses to provide interventions to students. Community collaborations with Materials for the Arts, Queens College, China's Advantage, Tsu Chi and Dancing classrooms provide access to additional arts, science and language programs and when a local community organization running an after school program for students was closing, the principal garnered funding to open an after school support program that offers dance, healthy eating, digital media and homework support classes. Finally, the school offers a plethora of enrichment opportunities of over twenty different options that focus on a variety of learning styles and talents that students self-select and take during the school day. This alignment of resources to student need has provided students with high levels of social-emotional supports, student work products demonstrate transference of this work into classroom tasks and struggling learners are showing gains on school based assessments.
 - The school program is structured to allow for common planning time four to five periods per week. Teachers are currently utilizing this time to analyze student work and schools based assessments and have developed tasks to focus on identified content or skill based weaknesses. The principal and staff use this data to form targeted remediation classes to address and monitor the specific needs of students. As a result of this programmatic structure, performance assessments are demonstrating student growth in comprehension skills and movement towards reading at grade level and increased student conceptual understanding of key math concepts ensuring improved student outcomes and preparation for the next grade level.
- Across all classrooms, teachers use assessments and rubrics that provide feedback to students and track progress allowing for effective instructional adjustments that meet student learning needs. (2.2)
 - The school uses common assessment tools such as base, mid and end line unit tasks and tests in all content areas, running records to measure reading growth, and a school based writing assessment aligned to opinion based writing standards and a community book of the month to measure student learning. Teacher teams and the school administration consistently analyze student tasks and assessment outcomes and track student progress through analysis of traits that represent standard bearing work products. For example, a second grade informative writing performance assessment measured student progress using focus, structure, development, word knowledge, punctuation and explanation of reading traits. Student progress was tracked by trait and class allowing for both grade and class analysis of student learning outcomes as well as alignment of curricula to the standards. The principal, SLT and

teacher teams use these assessment tools to monitor and revise school goals and teachers use them to adjust units and tasks and to set goals for their students, including English language learners and students with disabilities. This is leading to improvements in focused skills and traits as demonstrated within student writing and tasks within and across grades. The school wide focus of tracking and targeting specific trends in student learning, engages the school community in professional development and is shifting their thinking around ways to demonstrate consistency in checking for student understanding of content. Throughout the school, rubrics require students to reflect on their learning using rubric based language and progress of individual learning goals. Additionally, teachers use consistent strategies, such as quick checks, purposeful prompts, entrance/exit tickets and side shares with their peers to determine student growth on a daily basis. This focus allows teachers to ensure ongoing progress and challenge for all learners and students are well aware of their strengths and next learning steps as evidenced by strategic groupings in classrooms and students' ability to demonstrate their knowledge of standards through representations such as concept maps, problem solving grids and rubrics and through rich evidence based conversations about text.

- The Leadership has established a learning community that conveys high expectations to staff, students and their families that focus on raising student achievement and preparation for college and careers. (3.4)
 - Within the goal setting process, the principal works with the assistant principals and instructional team to structure and communicate high expectations and supports in order to move the learning needs of the school forward. Beginning in June, the administration and staff reflect on student response to the instructional core and they set curricular and instructional expectations together. School leaders and teacher peers then align this work to an instructional focus, the Danielson framework and the school wide and individual professional development plans. At multiple points in the year, the principal and teacher teams monitor progress and develop reports with supporting teacher tools to address both strengths and weaknesses identified regarding instructional core, school culture and the schools improvement vision. For example, this year the school focus on improving the quality of questioning to leverage more effective text based discussions is demonstrated through more rigorous student discussions within classrooms, as well as, improvements in students' ability to write to sources in all content areas. This work is embraced and reinforced by staff leading to a culture of mutual accountability to increase student outcomes.
 - Administrators and staff provide clear lines of reciprocal communication that provide parents with opportunities to focus on student learning. As part of the school wide goal to increase communication, the principal formed a parent academic and communication team and connects with families through monthly newsletters, parent information boards, an interactive school website, curriculum maps, clear behavioral and school culture expectations and family nights where parents work on common core aligned tasks with their children. Additionally, parents state that they not only attend school offered literacy and math workshops, but also Teachers College parent workshops that focus on key reading and writing strategies and ways parents can support their children at home. This work has led to a common language between staff and parents. One parent stated, "I have learned to embrace the common core" This work around communicating and supporting high expectations ensures

that parents have the tools to monitor and support the learning needs of their children.

- Thoughtful observation, feedback and professional development systems aligned to the Danielson framework and specific needs of teachers support professional growth throughout the school. (4.1)
 - In a continued effort to build instructional capacity, the administration and teacher peers developed an annual calendar with targeted cycles to ensure consistency of classroom visits. The administrative cabinet meets daily to discuss and track pedagogical trends, review samples of student tasks and calibrate feedback for efficacy and impact on teacher growth and reflection. Feedback to teachers is timely, and next steps reference impact of learning by targeting the actions of students observed during observations. Teacher ratings within each of the Danielson domains are compiled at the end of each cycle, aligned to professional learning goals and domain specific. Additionally, professional development is provided to teachers needing support. For those teachers needing more strategic professional development, a support plan is developed, aligned to short term individualized goals and assigned to staff developers. This purposeful observation, feedback and professional development structure is improving pedagogy within the domains of the Danielson framework, particularly in teacher ability to communicate with students more effectively and demonstrating observed improvements in the school wide instructional focus of questioning and discussion techniques leading to improved student work products as evidenced by growth in student writing assessment tasks showing strength in writing from sources and in students ability to choose appropriate concepts for application in math.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand upon teacher planning, task design and pedagogical skills to align to core concepts within the curriculum so students develop a deep understanding within and across subject areas to improve student outcomes. (1.2)
 - Although there is evidence across classrooms to support the school wide belief that students learn best through opportunities to reflect on learning experiences and by providing options in tasks and tools to support inquiry and active research reflective in student classwork, and this is consistent across classrooms, in some classrooms, deeper planning is required to convey clear and accurate relationships between skills, concepts and expectations and instructional outcomes to better align to the rigor of the school's curriculum and assessment practices. For example in one classroom visited, although the teacher engaged students in high level question scaffolds, provided multiple entry points for struggling learners, task boards for advanced students and aligned the objective of the lesson to both content and community book themes, evidence of planning was around the activity the students were asked to complete, thus not deepening student understanding of key concepts or content, resulting in and missed opportunities to fully elevate student learning outcomes.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Discovery School for Inquiry and Research	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score				X

Instructional Core

To what extent does the school regularly...	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

To what extent does the school ...	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

To what extent does the school ...	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
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