

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Robert H. Goddard

Middle School Q202

**138-30 Lafayette Street
Queens
NY 11417**

Principal: William M. Fitzgerald

**Dates of review: October 29, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Flavia Puello-Perdomo**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Robert Goddard School is a middle school with 1,029 students from 6^t through grade 8. The school population comprises 8% Black, 50% Hispanic, 7% White, 2% American Indian, and 33% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders strategically organize instructional time and resources in order to support the school's instructional goals, maximize teacher collaboration and support improvement in student learning. (1.3)
 - School leaders strategically target every resource toward improving student achievement and meeting school wide goals which are aligned to the citywide instructional expectations. The school purchased a web-based program to allow the school leaders to centralize classroom observations; therefore, providing access to the administrative team of all teacher observations conducted throughout the year and to track teacher progress as it relates to the Danielson Framework. The school collaborated with Public Color in order to provide the school community an opportunity to come together while deciding on colors for painting the school through a collaborative project. SMARTboards and computers have enhanced classroom instruction, particularly for students who are visual learners and English language learners. In one of the classrooms visited, the English as a Second Language teacher used an iPad to show pictures connected to a lesson conducted on working conditions of the late 1800's. In addition, language support is being offered through the use of Achieve 3000 and Brain Pop. The school was also selected to participate in the Teacher Incentive Fund which provides funding and support to develop teacher capacity and improve teacher practice. A program ambassador visits the school monthly, meets with peer instructional coaches and demonstrating teachers, and shares and discusses best practices across the school. The Teacher Incentive Fund supports the school long range goal of improving teacher quality and effectiveness by developing a shared vision for high quality instruction. As a result, student writing across content areas indicates significant academic improvement and a commitment to high, academic expectations.
 - School leaders have structured common planning time for all teachers at least twice weekly in professional groups across grades and vertically to collaborate in inquiry and planning in order to meet instructional expectations, increase professional collaboration, and share best practices. Teacher team meetings are facilitated by lead teachers. Teacher leaders ensure that the work taking place during these sessions is aligned with the school vision and instructional goals, in order to support consistency and coherence across the school. These meetings focus on analyzing student work, reviewing assessment results, norming grading practices, and discussing lesson implementation. This ensures that all learners work toward the same standard and that planning includes appropriate scaffolds for struggling students and English language learners. For example, during one of the meetings observed, teachers reviewed a baseline assessment and noticed students were struggling with supporting their arguments. One of the teachers suggested, "We need to first teach student how to unpack the task and then pick an argument so they can pull out textual evidence to support this." Then, another teacher shared possible strategies to assist students such as using graphic organizers and rubrics. As a result of this work, students benefit from lessons that are closely reviewed for alignment to the curriculum, and the application of strategies to develop independent thinking.

- The school maintains a highly supportive learning environment that systematically conveys high expectations and advances student performance. (3.4)
 - The principal holds daily cabinet meetings and weekly teacher leader meetings to make sure that expectations are clear and that teacher team work is focused on the instructional goals. Parents are very satisfied with the student progress updates available through Skedula (an online reporting system) and how accessible the school leadership and teachers are to meet and discuss the progress of their children. They explained that the school hosted parent workshops to define the expectations for students in meeting the demands of the Common Core Learning Standards. In addition, parents shared that the principal sent home letters and had a presentation to explain June 2013 assessment results and why student results dropped overall. Parents feel confident that their children will continue to improve their learning in spite of the new demands. One parent explained, “Teachers are on top of the kids. They (the kids) are adapting well even though there is a lot of pressure for them to do well.” They also feel that the school is helping the students to understand the demands of high school by engaging them in the admission process since 7th grade and preparing them for the specialized high school exams. Students value their relationships with teachers and believe that teachers are helping them to improve their learning. One of the students stated, “Teachers help us understand what we are learning instead of just skipping to the next subject.” Another student explained, “Teachers push us to our limit so we can do better. Teachers help you to think more, you have to think analytically. We are doing Socratic circles; there is no right or wrong answers; we need to support our arguments.” The guidance counselor also provides social-emotional support to students and provides resources and materials for high school and college awareness. As a result of the school’s unified set of high expectations, students are motivated about school as reflected in the school current yearly attendance of 96%.

- School leaders effectively utilize a research-based framework to closely monitor, assess and support teacher growth in building a shared understanding of instruction that positively affects student learning. (4.1)
 - The principal explained that teachers, for the past two years, have been working toward the implementation of lessons that align to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. This has allowed teachers to have a shared understanding of how the rubric is used for evaluation and teacher development. As a means of monitoring teacher performance and effectiveness, TeachBoost software is utilized by the administration to collect data from teacher observations. The principal uses this software to generate reports that analyze individual and school-wide instructional trends and uses this information as well as relevant student data to support teachers with changing their instructional practices. In addition, observations are shared among administrators in order to norm their expectations for teacher practice. Moreover, next steps and targeted feedback provided to teachers are shared with the lead teachers in order to offer additional support and ensure consistency of action. Professional development plans for the school and for individual and groups of teachers align to student data and result in improved teacher practice. New teachers are well supported by mentors and colleagues. Teachers are open and willing to seek out administrative support and are provided with mentoring, inter-visitations, and targeted professional development depending upon their needs. One teacher explained that the feedback they are receiving is helping them in terms of crafting more

rigorous questions, and providing appropriate wait time after posing a question. They also mentioned they have received feedback around making real-life connections in their teaching. They say that this has helped them to improve student engagement. As a result of these practices, the school leaders are able to analyze and focus areas of need for professional development and goals both across the school and for individual teachers. This leads to improvement in classroom practices and a shift in pedagogy that supports improved outcomes for all students.

- Across subject areas curricula and tasks that focus on Common Core standards offer opportunities for all students to engage in rigorous learning experiences and demonstrate critical thinking. (1.1)
 - School leaders and teachers make purposeful decisions aligning Common Core aligned curricula with rigorous tasks that clearly address the citywide instructional shifts. The school adopted the CodeX program for English Language Arts and CMP3 Mathematics because they believe these two programs requires students to think critically and promote high levels of student engagement. Teacher teams conducted data analysis of student baseline assessments and reviewed student work samples that reflect Common Core Learning Standards. This informed teachers of the needed curriculum adjustments and helped determine an instructional focus that targets student improvement. For instance, teachers are focused on academic vocabulary, comprehension, informational and argumentative writing, fluency, and problem solving; thereby, supporting instructional cohesion and coherence across grades and content areas. Scaffolds and differentiation strategies are embedded in daily lesson plans and discussed during teacher team meetings to ensure that all learners, including English language learners and special education students engage in appropriately challenging tasks. One of the teachers explained, “Teachers work together and discuss curriculum adaptation and strategies;” Additionally, “CMP3 expects a lot from students and we need to figure out how to scaffold and adjust the curriculum for our students while keeping the integrity of the task.” Lessons plans reviewed during classroom visits include carefully designed questions, such as this one in English language arts: “How do important decisions impact a person’s life?” In a 6th grade class, students, after reading the book [A Long Walk to Water](#), explore the challenges of building a well via a skype conference with a project manager in Africa. In three of the lessons observed, students were engaged in Socratic questioning and project-based learning. For example, student engaged in a Socratic seminar using the article the “Trying Times” students dialogue, responding to each other’s thoughts and ideas with questions, instead of just responding with the “right” answers. As a result of these efforts, all students have opportunities to engage in paired and class discussions that require them to think critically and allow them to formulate ideas and arguments supported by facts. Consequently, all students, including special education students and English language learners, are engaged in cognitively challenging tasks that allow them to demonstrate mastery of skills on a trajectory to college and career readiness.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen the practice of offering feedback and assessing mastery of lesson objectives to ensure that all learners have a clear understanding of expectations in order to maximize student progress toward achieving learning outcomes. (2.2)

- The school has effective practices in collecting and analyzing student assessment data to understand the strengths and areas of improvement for the school, its content, and the different groups of students. Teachers track student progress and use their inquiry team meetings to align data outcomes to curriculum adjustments. Although teachers provide actionable feedback to students and evaluating the lesson outcomes in some instances, the feedback is not meaningful in assisting students to understand how to reach learning goals and meet learning standards. For example, some of the feedback provided in writing samples focus on writing mechanics or teachers simply circling the appropriate categories on the rubrics without providing meaningful details on how to improve or explain which learning objective was not met by the students. This results in some students not being able to fully articulate what they need to do differently to demonstrate increased mastery of the standards.
- The school uses formative assessments across grades to determine student mastery of Common Core standards. In some classrooms teachers assess students through conferencing, class work, end of unit assessment and the use of “exit slips.” Exit slips ask students to complete a problem or answer a prompt to demonstrate mastery of the lesson objectives. In one literacy lesson, the teacher often checked understanding through effective questioning. The teacher purposefully selected students to answer questions so as to assess student understanding and make timely instructional adjustments to ensure all students were meeting the objectives. However, ongoing checks for understanding, or student self-assessment were not consistently aggregate in such a way that articulates the progress of specific sub-groups, including English language learners and special needs students so the adjustments to instruction in real time and in future lessons do not always correspond with their needs. This minimized clear learning targets for some student subgroups, thus hindering their academic achievement.
- Ensure that teaching strategies and academic tasks provide high quality curricula supports and extensions fostering higher order thinking and rigorous work products resulting in increased student ownership of learning. (1.2)
 - Strong collaboration between teachers and administration has resulted in school-wide instructional coherence that is evident in all classrooms. Each classroom visited had an agenda that conveyed to students the learning that will be accomplished that day. In addition, students were grouped to maximize their learning experiences, increase teacher support, and encourage student collaboration. One of the students stated, “Each unit, we get an essential question that gives us our goal for that unit.” Currently, there is a school-wide focus on questioning and discussion as a pathway for students to demonstrate critical thinking. For instance, during a Socratic seminar, students read the New York Times article “Trying Times” by Patricia Smith. Students were engaged in a group discussion in which they were directed to state an opinion, using evidence from the text to support it. One of the students explained, “Our teacher uses the Point Info Evidence (PIE) to help us write arguments.” Another student in sixth grade detailed, “We are writing a speech based on Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes. I need to use examples, details, and sophisticated language in my writing.” However, some teachers do not provide appropriate extensions through more strategic questioning to support all learners in deepening their learning and thus reaching their full potential. Moreover, although tasks and

lessons facilitate student participation, student-to-student dialogue and questions of high cognitive challenge are not yet consistently formulated by students. Consequently, student work products do not always reflect high levels of thinking and ownership.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Robert H. Goddard Middle 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