

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Public School 234

Elementary School

**30-15 29th Street
Queens
NY 11102**

Principal: Thea Pallos

Dates of review: March 12-13, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Dr. Philip A. Composto

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 234 is an elementary school with 643 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 4% Black, 39% Hispanic, 30% White, 25% Asian and 2% other students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.8%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and staff create a safe, nurturing and respectful environment that promotes learning and supports the needs of students and families. (1.4)
 - The school's theory of action focuses on promoting preferred behaviors such as being safe, responsible and respectful. For example, students who demonstrate positive and appropriate behaviors receive "Big Bucks" as rewards. Students use their rewards to choose from a menu of tangible activities, such as lunch with a teacher of their choice, ice cream celebrations or purchasing items of interest. The implementation of this school-wide practice actively motivates students to contribute to the positive school setting. Consequently, teachers and school leaders notice improved behaviors, especially in the lunchroom with fewer reported incidents. In addition, survey results gathered by the guidance counselor indicated that 18 out of 54 students demonstrated interest in making a positive difference in the school community. Therefore, the school elected a student council to promote involvement and student voice. Based on student feedback, the school sponsored Inside Broadway as a residency to integrate the arts and allocated funds for new book shelves and nonfiction books for classroom libraries. Students also engage in humanitarian activities through charitable events such as Jump Rope for Heart, Pennies for Patients, Dance-a-Thon for Cancer, and visit local nursing homes. Students state that their ideas are valued and that they contribute in a positive manner and guide the school's improvement efforts, also noted in the January survey results indicating that 100% of the students agree that they have a voice in school decisions which supports progress towards meeting the school's goals.
 - The school's attendance team works collaboratively to improve attendance and punctuality. For example, the team counsels families of identified students and provide an improvement plan which includes suggestions on how to get their child to school on time. The team also makes phone calls and parents receive automated messages reminding them of the time their children are expected in school. In addition, a sign-in process tracks students that arrive late. Consequently, punctuality improved significantly as noted in the distribution of fewer late passes and overall attendance has improved by 7%. The guidance counselor works closely with teachers to support students' social emotional learning and academic achievement. Based on a teacher survey, 40% of teachers in grades 4 and 5 suggested mediation and conflict resolution, respect and tolerance sessions to improve students' social-emotional skills. Therefore, the guidance counselor conducts small group conflict resolution sessions based on teachers' recommendations. Additionally, she provides lesson plans and conducts classroom visits on Respect for All and anti-bullying topics. Teachers implement lessons and teach multiple strategies and approaches to help students handle conflicts successfully. For example, two female students in the fourth grade continuously teased each other. After a series of lessons on fostering respect and friendship, the two girls were able to make connections, understand each other's' feelings and discuss their points of view. As a result, both girls successfully resolved their issues, became friends and launched an anti-bullying project for their grade. The

guidance counselor resurveyed teachers four weeks later and the results indicated that 100% of teachers agreed that students were able to successfully resolve behavioral issues and disagreements among themselves.

- The principal uses resources effectively to build teacher capacity and improve instruction as evidenced by increased student engagement in academic tasks. (1.3)
 - School leaders adjust the budgetary focus on an ongoing basis to impact student achievement and fulfill the schools Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) goals. For example, English as a second language teachers push into classrooms lowering the student to teacher ratio. All students benefit from English as a second language (ESL) methodologies and strategies such as use of picture cues to enhance writing, total physical response, vocabulary development and scaffolding of skills. The creative use of the instructional coach supports interventions for kindergarten and first grade targeted students. Intervention periods are built in to cluster teachers' schedules to address specific student needs and goals that were initially determined from State data. Furthermore, substitute teachers are hired on a monthly basis to support grade inquiry and curriculum development. They create assessments, review item analysis checklists, identify gaps in skills, and set individualized goals based on data to meet students' needs. Consequently, teachers noted an 85% improvement of targeted subgroup data reflected in performance assessments and writing products in student folders.
 - The school program includes structured time for teachers to meet, including an additional common planning period and after school professional collaboration sessions. Teacher teams develop units of study based on the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) more precisely to impact student growth. The Response to Intervention (RtI) team meets every other Friday to discuss specific students and their goals. Extended day is creatively divided into two fifty minute student intervention sessions and one fifty minute inquiry development session where teacher teams examine student work and share best practices on a weekly basis. As a result of inquiry team meetings, teachers create meaningful data driven instructional plans that increase student outcomes as evident in improved performance on assessments. In addition, visits to classrooms demonstrate that students are more actively engaged in challenging learning experiences. For example, teachers assist students activate their prior knowledge to help them comprehend what they read. Another effective strategy helps students focus on subheadings and turn these into questions. This helped students by giving them awareness of where in the text to zoom in and connect the information. Therefore, post assessments in mathematics indicate an increase from 65% to 80% of students showing mastery of numbers and operations and in English language arts (ELA) there was an increase from 58% to 74% showing mastery in finding information and understanding.
- School leaders support a high level of pedagogy through effective evaluation of instruction aligned to the Danielson's framework for teaching, resulting in strong teacher practice that improves student outcomes. (4.1)

- School administrators conduct frequent cycles of classroom visits using the Danielson Framework to provide feedback to teachers. Feedback clearly captures strengths and next steps to support teacher development and improve classroom practice. For example, equipped with strategies, the administrative team divided the faculty into coaching teams consisting of one administrator and one teacher. Each week, the teams meet for an observation debriefing format. In this fashion, administrators identify “bit sized” items from observed lessons and address these during coaching sessions. Upon subsequent visits to classrooms, administrators follow up on suggestions discussed during coaching to ensure that they are immediately implemented. For example, during a classroom observation, the administrator noted the use of repeated low level types of questions. Therefore, during the coaching session, the administrator reminded the teacher to refer to Webb’s Depth of Knowledge and the Hess Cognitive Rigor Matrix in order to plan high quality questions that prompt student thinking. In addition, the coach collaborates with new teachers by coaching into lessons alongside the teachers. The coach takes an active role in the lesson and adds higher order questions to enhance class discussion, where appropriate. The coach gradually steps back during the remainder of the lesson and continues taking low inference notes on how the teacher maintains a pattern of posing higher order questions. Administrators analyze observation data and feedback statements, and categorize these into six areas. Each area is color coded and transferred to an excel sheet. This sheet provides a clear summary of areas of mastery as well as those requiring further development in each observation cycle. As a follow up, teachers receive a letter which indicates the areas of need as well as available internal professional development to support their development. As a result, 94% of the staff indicated in a school-based survey that administrators are clear in their communication of expectations for teacher practice which in turn provides guidance in helping them meet their professional goals.

- School leaders and teachers effectively align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and offer engaging learning experiences that challenge students and support their learning. (1.1)
 - School leaders review the citywide instructional expectations and adopt Common Core across the school. Grade level teams identify areas in the curriculum that require more focused planning and support in the integration of the instructional shifts. For example, they create curriculum maps that incorporate Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questions at levels 3 and 4, design graphic organizers to assist students in linking their ideas when writing from sources and added informational texts to classroom libraries to support content standards. As a result, students participate in rich, engaging curricula that foster college and career readiness, evident in the great variety of projects displayed throughout the school and in classrooms that meet the demands of the Common Core.

 - Academic tasks and curricula are refined using data so that all students have access to the curricula. Teachers and teams identify skills of focus grounded in data analysis and support student success through specific plans to address student needs. For example, during a grade 2 planning session, teachers engaged in planning a unit on time and money in math. After administering CCLS aligned pre-assessments, teachers used an

itemized checklist to quantify student performance. Teachers identified the skills that students were successful in and needed enrichment, and highlighted the CCLS skills they needed support and remediation in. Teachers noted that English language learners (ELL) needed remediation in order to better access math tasks on the topic of money. The goal was for students to use and count coins in different ways. Hands on visual activities such as the use of play money were provided for students to shop in the class store, a t-chart on different ways to make a dollar (\$1.00) using manipulatives was created, and the Promethean board was used to play an interactive money game identifying coins, their value and finding equivalent value of coins. Consequently, these refinements cognitively engaged students as noted in the mid-line assessment results which indicate that 90% students achieved the skill on finding equivalent values of coins.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen teacher assessment practices to reflect effective feedback to students in order to make instructional adjustments and provide clear next steps to improve learning outcomes. (2.2)
 - The school has effective practices in collecting and analyzing data from student assessments to understand the strengths and areas of improvement for the school, classes, individual and groups of students. However, not all student work includes feedback in the form of next steps for improvement. As a result, teachers are not fully able to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum or instructional decisions or to provide all students with targeted next learning steps. Teacher teams and individual teachers use conference notes, and curricular aligned end of unit assessments to supplement summative data and identify student performance levels. However, the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment within instructional periods to make immediate adjustments to lessons is not a fully embedded practice across the school. This limits teachers' ability to pinpoint and address the special needs of student subgroups and modify targeted class-based interventions to accelerate learning. Consequently, instructional strategies and learning tasks are not always strategically revised, hindering opportunities to meet the needs of all students.
- Refine teaching practices to ensure the vast majority of teachers strategically provide multiple entry points so that lessons challenge all students and result in the production of meaningful work products. (1.2)
 - Teachers use scaffolds to provide multiple entry points into instruction in their lesson planning in response to students' needs and interests, including special education students. The use of interactive word walls across classrooms helps all students build their vocabulary. Also, the school focuses on supporting English language learners (ELLs) by having certified English as second language (ESL) teachers who push into classrooms. However in some classrooms, students who finished tasks early were given additional similar work or waited for teacher approval. Therefore, lessons do not always challenge all students, particularly high performers, to their full potential, in that assignments do not include opportunities for them to demonstrate higher order skills or extend their learning, thus limiting even greater participation and learning outcomes.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Public School 234	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