



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Quality Review
Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning
2013-2014

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

The Gordon Parks School

Elementary-Middle School Q270

**233-15 Merrick Blvd
Queens
NY 11422**

Principal: Chayvonne F. Harper

Dates of review: May 12 – 13, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Lenon Murray

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Gordon Parks School is an elementary-middle school with 651 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 94% Black, 3% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 96.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and faculty effectively align curricular materials and text selection to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), as reflected in planned curricula that cognitively engage all learners. (1.1)
 - The school continues to build on the progress of the previous year and their instructional team uses the Citywide Instructional Expectations to promote the shifts in instruction needed to align with the CCLS. They aligned their curriculum and academic tasks to the CCLS and emphasized literacy before they settled on the ReadyGen, Codex and other materials for which they received recommendations. Teacher teams have deepened their work to include writing across the content areas that includes English language learners and special education students. The leaders and faculty discuss student performance and refine curriculum maps and unit plans as guides to selectively and effectively use the purchased materials. GoMath! was chosen for kindergarten through grade 8. Consequently, using data informed processes, the school determined which aspects of the new materials needed in-depth treatment and which sections could be moved through more quickly. College and career readiness were a focus of the literacy skills. This deliberate approach to thinking through curriculum built coherence through the curriculum materials even though they were new to the school.
 - The teacher teams made some adjustments to the unit plans that came with the new curricular materials. They used Webb's Depth of Knowledge chart to evaluate the tasks that the students were required to know and to do. Tasks that proved inadequate were revised by teacher teams. Even unit plans in subject areas like science, social studies and art contained elements like higher order essential questions, big ideas, assessments and cognitively engaging work with entry points for special education students and English language learners. Additionally, all grade levels are immersed in activities that improve their comprehension skills and their critical thinking. For example, teachers coach students to develop their own questions, to work collaboratively rather than individually, and to use curricula to identify areas for further research. As a result, students are required to use text-based evidence in speaking and writing across the core subject areas.
- The school effectively and strategically uses a wide range of assessments aligned to curricula that guide planning and instructional adjustments that result in student improvement. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams and individual teachers develop and revise rubrics that are aligned with the CCLS and the new curriculum materials. Tailored rubrics result in highly effective teacher feedback and clear next steps for students. For example, the state rubrics for the middle school assessments were modified into clearer language to align with the ReadyGen and Codex curricula and to make them more precise for students. This was done while maintaining the state's original rigorous criteria. Teachers also include more academic vocabulary in their lesson planning so that expectations become

clearer and assist students in achieving success. When assessment criteria are transparent and clearly written, students know and can explain what is required of them. An eighth grade student said that his rubric indicates to him why he did not receive a perfect score on his paper and he knows what he needs to do to improve it. In this instance, he needed more details in his writing. Teachers use the feedback to plan future lessons that improve upon their prior efforts. As a result of these focused, strategic assessments, student work products are improving as indicated in student workbooks and portfolios.

- Teacher teams and individual teachers are able to clearly articulate reasons for the wide range of assessments that are embedded in the unit plans and curriculum materials and aligned with CCLS. These assessments provide information about the strengths and areas of need of student performance and the rate of progress towards meeting class and school goals. For example, the unit tests and fall benchmark results in literacy indicated the need across the school to strengthen the skill of using text evidence to support a position or argument and in math to refine number sense with regard to fractions. During team meetings, teachers use the analysis of student work to indicate trends that enable them to chart implications for their teaching through the identification of specific instructional strategies. These strategies include, and are not limited to, using precise academic vocabulary and providing sufficient details to support inferences. As a result, periodic benchmark assessment results from fall to spring have significantly improved among all student groups including students with disabilities, and teachers agree that there is increasing alignment of instructional strategies with assessments.
- The principal makes strategic organizational decisions that promote effective shared decision-making and result in coordinated efforts to improve pedagogy and student work products. (1.3)
 - The school leader's thoughtful programming allows teachers to collaborate with colleagues during the school day every week for a double period. At these meetings teachers evaluate student work and share ideas with regard to curriculum implementation, effective assessments and instructional strategies. For example, the fifth grade team devised assessments that would measure oral presentation skills. The teams are influential in implementing the Danielson Framework for Teaching as they respond to the talent coach and processes for shared understanding. The teams also examine student work and share ideas for increasing cognitive rigor and assigning academic tasks. For example, the early grade team works to simplify and tailor assignments, particularly homework, to make them more relevant to the lessons. This has resulted in students working with challenging academic assignments such as writing essays with their own ideas and improved quality of work as detailed in their final graded effort.
 - The school has effectively partnered with outside organizations, such as a neighborhood law firm to create a Mock Trial Residency Program for 7th and 8th grade students. Students are exposed to legal language, terminology and protocols used during trials in court. Reso A grants from the local councilman has upgraded the computer hardware and software that supports the academic needs of all learners. Struggling students receive support at afterschool and Saturday academy from qualified staff. Teachers have common prep periods, additional planning periods, and staff

who push into classrooms and provide small group targeted instruction to identified learners. Staff assignments are designed to contribute directly to improvement efforts by enabling teachers to meet weekly and analyze data, examine student work, design engaging tasks and make adjustments such as stripping ReadyGen to its essentials and leaving out redundant effort. Teams have refined their protocols and there is a shared understanding of the school's instructional goals including an improvement in writing quality. As a result, students have benefitted from the support as evidenced in improved work products on bulletin boards and in portfolios graded by rubrics.

- Observation and feedback protocols aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching provide teachers with next steps and clear expectations that enhance school-wide practice. (4.1)
 - The school enthusiastically implements the Danielson Framework for Teaching across all classrooms. The leaders have shared with the faculty that coherent planning, questioning and discussion, and ongoing assessments play a major role in the process of school-wide improvement. The administration engages in short cycles of frequent formal and informal observations based on the preferences and selections on the teachers at their initial planning conferences. Teachers throughout the school, including those new to the school or the profession, participate in classroom intervisitations that support school and individual teachers' goals in alignment with the expectations of the CCLS. The school leaders have implemented a highly structured observation schedule that facilitates school administrators visiting classrooms regularly and charting the results in Advance, the online portal where results are stored. The leadership provides teachers with specific, targeted feedback that is based on low inference observations of teachers' daily classroom practice and ensures that the instructional needs of teachers are addressed through professional development. The talent coach and content area specialists from the network provide expert training that helps drive improvements in teacher pedagogy and includes the citywide instructional shifts. Teachers have supported each other in deepening their learning together, and during a teacher team meeting grade 5 teachers commented that they have refined their pedagogy in close reading and that has positively impacted their students' writing. The leaders analyze student work products routinely during many of the classroom observations along with student assessment results. As a result of the teacher team collaborating and planning lessons together, using protocols to examine student work, and identifying and applying effective strategies, teachers in grade 5 have shown improvement in teaching short essay writing to their students as measured by their portfolio work.
 - The school leaders' effective feedback captures the strengths and challenges of each teacher and provides specific next steps that align with the tenets of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teachers receive timely feedback that includes both an open discussion and a written summary and that supports professional growth. During post-observation conferences, specific support and interventions are offered and accepted. These include embedded coaching, modeling of lessons and trainings both within and outside the school. Consequently, the ongoing evaluation of teacher practice has increased acute awareness of student achievement

and strengthens teacher pedagogy as evidenced in teacher observation reports.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand the use of multiple entry points and the instructional shifts to provide effective challenges that maximize student learning. (1.2)
 - Flexible student groupings are evident in classrooms, particularly those with special education students and English language learners, of whom there are only a few in the entire school. Multiple entry points, facilitated by some differentiation of instruction and based on classroom assessments, are evident in the majority of lessons. Teachers plan together and higher order thinking questions are used in lessons based on level 3 and above of Webb's Depth of Knowledge matrix. During mini-lessons, teachers connect the new teaching to students' prior knowledge of the topic and they encourage students to make connections in their learning. For example, in an eighth grade social studies lesson, the teacher instructed students to imagine themselves in Germany during the Second World War and write responses based on texts and photographs they were studying. The teacher asked many probing, higher-order questions that encouraged deeper thinking as students shared out their responses in skill-based groups. However, there is insufficient evidence across classrooms that teachers change their groups frequently in a multitude of ways that reflect the entry points into the curricula. Moreover, even though teachers develop higher order questions and utilize them in class, student questions are not adequately supported or encouraged. As a result, students sometimes participate in lessons that limit their ability to be cognitively engaged in tasks at an advanced level.

- Deepen the commitment of the school community to fostering a more nurturing environment that supports the social and academic needs of students. (1.4)
 - The school has connected the adults to the students in their care in such a way that each student is known quite well by at least one adult. These faculty members usually know when a child is absent and can usually discuss their basic developmental needs. For example, some students are self-starters and others need daily motivation. This begins with classroom teachers and extends to the guidance counselor, the cluster teachers and even the administrators. The principal conveys her respect and support through her daily electronic message, faculty conferences, cabinet meetings, family nights and progress reports. The guidance counselor speaks regularly with "at risk" students. As the administrators do their daily rounds, they will pull students in for discussion if they are struggling in class or the common meeting areas. Character education is embedded in the "Voices" literacy program that the school uses as a supplement. However, the guidance counselor and the administrators are the main people who deliberately take care of the social-emotional needs of students. Classroom teachers have displayed a laser-like focus on academic success. As a result, students in distress can move unnoticed through the halls until they act out and it is brought to the attention of administrators, thus there are missed opportunities to support students' personal development in all aspects of the school environment.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Gordon Parks 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