



**Department of  
Education**

*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report 2013-2014**

**Westerleigh**

**Elementary School 030**

**200 Wardwell Avenue  
Staten Island  
NY 10314**

**Principal: Alan Ihne**

**Dates of review: February 10 - 11, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Jessica Jenkins**

## **Part 1: The school context**

### **Information about the school**

Westerleigh is an elementary school with 811 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 3% Black, 21% Hispanic, 68% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 20% 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 93.7%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Classroom instruction consistently reflects the school's rigorous and student-inquiry based focus, resulting in high-levels of student engagement, student ownership, and enthusiasm for learning. (1.2)
  - Student ownership of learning and student discourse is the foundation of all instructional practices across classrooms. The principal acknowledged that this been a paradigm shift for many teachers and has strategically addressed this shift through an emphasis on questioning and discussion as referenced by the Danielson Framework and through an active book study around *Developing More Curious Minds*, which describes practical strategies to spur students' ability and willingness to pose and answer their own questions. Through this book study, teachers engage in professional dialogue about the quality of inquisitiveness in their own classrooms and collaboratively develop ways to increase student curiosity, inquiry, and the quality of dialogue between students. Exit tickets for staff capture reflective responses to readings and next steps for classroom implementation. A review of staff exit tickets and classroom visitations suggest that individual teachers are implementing strategies that promote wonder, critique, and deep exploration, a direct result of the school's focus on these areas. In one special education third grade math classroom, the teacher engaged her students in an investigation of perimeter using shapes on the floor representing tile units. Groups of students were to articulate the relationship between perimeter of squares and rectangles based on collected data and observation. The teacher then showed a visual animation video, pausing at key points to prompt construction of learning and solidify understanding, resulting in mastery of the teaching point evidenced by a collection of differentiated exit slips. In a fourth grade science classroom, the teacher utilized the "5 E's Lesson" plan format to promote engagement and exploration of static electricity, followed by a student-led discussion in which students were required to reflect, collaborate, listen, and debate. Students were expected to challenge each other's thinking with alternative rationale and build upon the responses of others using accountable talk prompts, resulting in high levels of student thinking and participation. Furthermore, a collection of argumentative writing and responses to literature suggest that students demonstrated increased use of text evidence and ownership in their writing, as compared to writing samples from earlier units.
- The administration's organizational decisions and deeply reflective use of all resources are strategically aligned to the school's instructional goals, as evidenced by improved teacher pedagogy and student learning. (1.3)
  - Teacher grade teams that are programmed to meet twice a week for collaborative planning, in addition to a weekly inquiry period, consistently use protocols to analyze student work and make adjustments to teacher pedagogy, leading to designing multiple points of access for all students to make progress toward mastery of CCLS. Furthermore, several teachers have built into their program a

designated period for curriculum mapping using a web-based curriculum mapper that tracks refinements, edits, and modifications. Strategic teaming has resulted in a culture whereby teachers meet before and after school, and during lunch to share best practices, create meaningful and rigorous student-centered lesson plans, and effectively evaluate student work products leading to improved outcomes for all students. Consequently, the school has made significant progress toward student ownership of learning. In one teacher team meeting, a group of English language arts teachers dissected an evidenced-based writing piece and surmised the need for the department to reexamine and scaffold the Junior Great Books "Building Your Answer Sheet" graphic organizer, resulting in increased access for all learners to a rigorous task. In another team meeting, teachers were observed sharing video clips of their own classroom instruction, resulting in a reflective dialogue identifying shared instructional practices, practices worth reexamining, and practices they don't currently employ but will try because they contributed to improved student work products. A review of teacher observation reports and the lesson for which the observation was based, suggest the use of shared strategies that result in access to challenging academic tasks.

- Teacher voice and the acknowledgement of individual strengths of the staff are taken into account for teacher placement. For example, the principal's strategic decision to departmentalize the fifth grade based on teacher strengths has elevated the rigor across these classrooms, as evidenced by rich units of study aligned to the instructional shifts of the CCLS. This is illustrated in an argumentative unit whereby students are required to support claims with textual evidence while simultaneously anticipating and addressing counter arguments. Provided with choice in topic selection, several students chose "Vending Machines in Schools," citing the controversy around the topic and the plethora of resources available to support claims. Additionally, the fifth grade social studies and science teachers push into lower grade classrooms, resulting in increased coherence and rigor. A math coach, science teacher, and two special education teachers, have been strategically programmed to provide Response to Intervention (RtI) in six-week cycles and serve as case managers for groups of students, including English Language Learners (ELL's) and Students with Disabilities (SWD's). In addition to providing intervention to struggling students, case managers also utilize the *Pre-Referral Intervention Manual* as a resource for teachers, resulting in increased awareness and strategic planning for struggling students. Additionally, paraprofessionals provide Reading Rescue and a group of parents certified as teachers are assigned to individual classrooms throughout the year to offer academic support. Furthermore, a partnership with St. John's University provides additional academic intervention services by a group of students currently working towards a graduate degree in education. Initially, these graduate students shadow teachers and then transition to working with individual students based on need, resulting in increased one-on-one support to improve access to rigorous instruction for all students.

- School leaders, staff, and parents, work cohesively to promote a respectful and caring environment that enhances students' academic and personal growth and supports adult learning. (1.4)

- High levels of trust in the new principal on the part of the staff, parents, and students, has resulted in an inclusive culture for all constituent groups that support improved student performance. Across all interviews, a central theme emerged: the principal is viewed as a leader who elevates voice, listens to and acts upon diverse perspectives, and broadens involvement and support for improved teacher pedagogy and overall morale. Through countless student-centered programs, the school ensures that every child is well known by at least one adult. A thorough peer mediation program is facilitated by the guidance counselor and is steered by students. A student council, facilitated by a third grade teacher, promotes student voice through student-led community service activities, spirit days, and movie nights. One student proudly stated, “If we present our ideas and our reasons for wanting to bring something to our school, the principal generally agrees.” Furthermore, an honor roll and student of the month celebration have been reestablished by the administration with clear criteria on an accompanying rubric. A science cluster teacher leads sustainability efforts through a “Green Team” and partnership with NYC Grows to increase gardening and recycling efforts that are now recognized as a model for other schools. A school-wide contest for paper recycling bins inspired the team, resulting in expansion of the teams’ efforts to promote the use of milk cartons in gardening. Furthermore, students who participate on this team assist with teaching sustainability to the lower grades, promoting increased student ownership of learning and student discourse, the school’s primary instructional goals.
- Strong professional collaborations across grades enable teachers to reflect on student work, improve pedagogy, and develop teacher leadership skills to improve student achievement. (4.2)
  - All teachers participate in teacher teams where leadership is shared through rotating facilitation of meetings. Teams meet regularly across grades and content areas, to collaboratively analyze student work in an effort to improve teacher pedagogy. Teams routinely engage in a tuning protocol to analyze student work and plan for next steps. A presenting teacher describes the task, shares the lesson plan, student work samples, and offers a focused question such as, “How can I ensure that students utilize text evidence with consistency throughout a writing piece?” Group members then examine the work and lesson plan presented, and offer feedback to the presenting teacher. Feedback drives the remaining portion of the team meeting and results in modifications to grade-level lesson plans. Teachers open the next meeting with a discussion on the implementation of those modifications and its impact on student performance. When asked how teacher teams have strengthened instructional capacity, the team shared, “Our principal trusts our judgment as professionals and this has empowered us to become the best teacher leaders we can be.” This collegial and shared leadership among teachers is also evident across all Integrated Co-teaching (ICT) classrooms where both teachers work in tandem to provide differentiated support to all students utilizing well-developed lesson plans across content areas. Consequently, student

performance in these classrooms has drastically increased as evidenced by a collection of work products across units.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Further refine Common Core aligned curricula to promote increased coherence across grades and address the varied needs of all learners. (1.1)
  - After extensive collaboration and research, the school implemented the Core Knowledge curriculum for grades K-2, citing its more advanced approach to phonics, incorporation of in-depth content, and the correlation between constructing knowledge and inquiry that Junior Great Books promotes in later grades. To supplement Junior Great Books in grades 3-5 and improve writing across grades, teachers have created Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) aligned writing units utilizing Expeditionary Learning modules. The strategic and thoughtful implementation of both programs with fidelity has resulted in school-wide efforts to build instructional coherence across grades. After piloting Envisions math two years ago, the school continues to build upon and enhance staff and student ownership of it, through the promotion of increased mathematical discourse. Across curricula, students are required to use discipline-specific vocabulary and engage in regular student discourse promoting rigor, as evidenced by a third grade lesson that engaged students in a Socratic circle around “The Fire on the Mountain” and a fifth grade math lesson whereby students were encouraged to challenge each other’s thinking using content-specific math prompts. Although teachers have aligned curricula to the CCLS, have integrated the instructional shifts across content areas, and are promoting college and career readiness through rigorous units of study, the school is still crafting clearly defined criteria for what it means to exit a grade level and to attain the enduring understandings and key skills across grades.
  - Teachers and school leaders ensure that a diversity of learners have access to rigorous and engaging academic tasks through regular common planning, weekly curriculum planning, and data meetings. During these designated periods, lesson plans are examined and refined using classroom level data, providing opportunities for teachers to make pedagogical changes in order to address the needs of a range of learners. During one math team meeting, teachers watched a video of the presenting teacher’s lesson around questioning, with the chosen focus being, “How can I create more opportunities for student-led questioning to promote more discussion?” This resulted in the brainstorming of strategies, specifically around how to further differentiate the lesson prompts for all learners and the suggestion that the teacher introduce additional math prompts to promote increased discussion. While this teacher team targeted both ELL’s and SWD’s observed in the math lesson and incorporated additional strategies for follow-up lessons, curriculum maps do not yet sufficiently include comprehensive extensions to address the highest achieving students, despite New York State testing data that indicates 40% of the students are performing at or above grade level.

- Strengthen the use of common grade-wide, curriculum-aligned assessment data to capture a clear portrait of student mastery and track progress towards school wide goals across grades. (2.2)
  - The school utilizes common assessments appropriate to the goals of each grade band. Lower grade teachers utilize running records to track reading progress, resulting in targeted support for individuals and groups of students. Edperformance is used for grades 3 through 5 to monitor student deficits and as a tool to inform Response to Intervention (RTI) offered. A comprehensive data table provides a scale score, ranking, and specific learning objectives the instrument tested. Moreover, this data provides information regarding student progress toward grade-level goals and allows intervention teachers to target instruction accordingly. Teachers have designed their own CCLS-aligned periodic assessment for Envisions, resulting in alignment across grades and adjustments to instruction based on data. However, the school has not formalized a system to track progress of individual and groups of students based on common assessment data beyond those students receiving RTI. This limits teachers from identifying more granular strengths and needs of all students over time in order to further improve their learning outcomes. Furthermore, in some classrooms, teachers are not utilizing assessment data to identify those students who have mastered specific concepts, limiting opportunity for meaningful feedback focused on proficiency.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Westerleigh School					UD	D	P	WD
<b>Overall QR Score</b>							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	