



**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 Gifford School

31R032

**32 Elverton Avenue
Staten Island
NY 10308**

Principal: Nancy Spataro

Dates of review: April 23 - 24, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Jessica Jenkins

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Gifford School is an elementary school with 785 students from pre-kindergarten through grade five. The school population comprises 1% Black, 15% Hispanic, 79% White, 3% Asian, and 2% other students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 93.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has collaboratively created a rigorous curriculum across grades and subject areas, aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), ensuring student engagement and meeting the needs of all learners. (1.1)
 - School leaders and teachers have strategically implemented and adapted both Ready Gen and Go Math, enhancing these programs with Engage NY, Junior Great Books, and web-based CCLS-aligned resources. A thoughtful integration of the instructional shifts expose students to a rich and rigorous curriculum while simultaneously infusing college and career readiness, resulting in coherence across grades. In a fourth grade persuasive writing unit, students read and analyzed a variety of exemplary opinion pieces written by students on relevant and interest-based topics such as school uniforms, the usefulness of homework, and cell phones in schools. After a careful analysis of text structure and strategies for persuasive writing, students co-authored a self-selected opinion piece supplemented with differentiated graphic organizers, checklists for self-monitoring, and reference sheets inclusive of academic vocabulary and helpful transition words for English Language Learners and special education students. Consequently, all students generated high-quality writing pieces that demonstrated notable growth across the unit as evidenced by careful data analysis by the teacher for individual and groups of students. Similarly, a fifth grade unit of study requires that students explore injustices of the world, engaging them in a variety of real-world topics including female participation in male-dominated sports and the pros and cons of zoos. Hence, all students are responsible for demonstrating their thinking.
- Academic tasks and discussion require all students to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in order to cognitively engage all students in the learning process. (1.2)
 - Across all classrooms, students engage in rigorous tasks that support metacognition and inquiry, resulting in the creation of high-quality work products. In one kindergarten class, Socratic discussion and student-generated questions guided a discussion on *The King of the Frogs*, resulting in participation on the part of all students. A color-coded discussion flow chart allowed the teacher to capture responses and assess student understanding as students grappled with questions such as, “Why do the frogs need a king to keep them orderly?” and “Is Mamba a good king for the frogs?” Accountable talk prompts, visual aids, and sentence starters provided multiple entry points for all students to access the discussion and a subsequent writing task required students to use text evidence to support their argument. In a fourth grade math class, students discovered the relationship between the area of square units and their perimeters utilizing an engaging text that explored how a family reunion resulted in math confusion when family members undertook how to configure tables and chairs to accommodate the guests, placing learning in a real-world context for students. In readiness groups, students discovered that shapes with the same area can sometimes have

different perimeters, while a push-in support teacher utilized geo-boards in one small group to provide a visual representation of perimeter and area. Students considered possible solutions through discussion and experimentation of multiple table configurations, resulting in high levels of student thinking and ownership of learning by all students.

- Frequent classroom observations and follow-up professional development leads to teachers' understanding of strengths and areas for improvement, resulting in improved classroom practice and student outcomes. (4.1)
 - The strategic use of frequent cycles of observation, combined with a focused teacher inter-visitation schedule, includes pointed feedback focused on pedagogy and student work products. For example, multiple observation reports and inter-visitation notes include deep reflections of instructional practice and purposeful shifts to instruction, specifically in the area of feedback to students and levels of questioning. Consequently, all teachers have made progress in the area of questioning, engagement, and assessment, as evidenced by carefully tracked observation data.
 - Frequent observation cycles track teacher growth along a continuum of the Danielson Framework, indicating teacher strengths and next steps. School leaders track professional learning electronically by component and participant, resulting in careful monitoring of teacher development. A differentiated professional development plan identifies teachers who demonstrate specific strengths in their practice, how the school leverages these strengths, and areas where teachers have shown growth as a result of targeted support. Consequently, teachers can clearly articulate their progression and can demonstrate how professional learning has contributed to more comprehensive planning and improved student outcomes evidenced by process of learning boards reflective of student growth throughout a unit of study as measured by CCLS aligned rubrics and in depth peer and teacher feedback.
- The school has established a culture of high expectations for staff and students, ensuring that rigorous learning and a foundation for college and career readiness are embedded in every learning experience. (3.4)
 - School leaders establish a culture of high expectations for the staff through carefully crafted professional learning opportunities focused on a common understanding of rigor, resulting in the development of high quality learning experiences for students. Across grades, teachers regularly turn-key professional development and open their classrooms for inter-visitation, promoting a culture of excellence and high expectations for teaching and learning across the school. During a team meeting, upper grade teachers referenced specific support offered by their peers and assistant principal, highlighting the mutual accountability for high expectations modeled across the school community.
 - All students are deeply engaged in rigorous learning experiences that foster a level of independent thinking and learning. Teacher teams design tasks to promote persistence and resilience in pursuing and attaining learning goals and help students develop strategies to work through a problem despite its degree of difficulty. Across grades, students can clearly articulate how they have internalized strategies for organizing

ideas, summarizing information, and connecting big ideas, resulting in school wide ownership of learning evidenced in multiple student work products. Consistent and high-leverage feedback provides students with a clear set of next steps aligned to the CCLS and is inclusive of deeply reflective self-assessment and peer feedback. For instance, in one Kindergarten class, students utilized the interactive SMART board to rate their own understanding of the lesson along a continuum using pictorial representations of mastery, later mentioned in a team meeting as a strategy the team has implemented to increase student ownership of learning. During the small group meeting, students were able to show their progress over time through various writing genres and multi-step word problems as well as articulate how their teachers scaffold learning experiences from one task to the next. One student described how her teacher created an individualized checklist for her based on her own learning needs given her “struggles with focus and organization,” while another student showed how multiple teachers use different graphic organizers to help him to “break down” each step of the writing process, noting his own “difficulty with making it all come together,” and how his new approach to the writing process across content areas has improved his published pieces over time, thus demonstrating a tailored process that prepares students for their next level.

- A variety of precise and thorough feedback to students, from both teachers and peers, promotes a reflective culture focused on progress, resulting in effective instructional adjustments and ownership of learning. (2.2)
 - Students take ownership in the development of their rubrics and regularly engage in self and peer assessment. Checklists and feedback formats are developmentally appropriate for the lower grades as well as for English language learners and special education students, inclusive of images and symbols in order to familiarize students on the expected outcomes and engage them early on in a process of reflection. In second grade, student work products contain peer feedback inclusive of sentence starters such as “Wow, I liked it when you” and “Next time remember to” as well as more sophisticated commentary in later grades. Throughout lessons teachers monitor student understanding through various formative assessment strategies including entrance and exit slips, 3-2-1, and think-pair-share. Teachers continually monitor student progress on common tasks across all content areas to track student growth and make effective adjustments to unit plans, yielding strong improvement in student assessment data, evidenced by 100% of self-contained students moving up at least one grade level and eight of twelve students moving up at least three levels according to the Teacher’s College Reading Assessment. Furthermore, written tasks are consistently analyzed for groups of students, which inform small group instruction and the modification of tasks to ensure access for all students, resulting in advancing student learning. This is evidenced in multiple student work samples across grades and ability levels demonstrating progress in adding text evidence, organization, focus, and development according to comprehensive CCLS-aligned rubrics.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand the current teacher team structure to systematically analyze classroom practices across grades and subjects, resulting in refinements to pedagogy and mastery of learning goals for groups of students. (4.2)
 - Mini inquiry teams by grade level and a larger inquiry team meeting inclusive of teachers from across grades engage in collaborative analysis of CCLS-aligned tasks and accompanying student work, promoting the school-wide goal of increased rigor in academic tasks. A discussion of strategies to support a range of learners results in modifications to lessons and units of study. For example, the third grade team enhanced a narrative unit for English language learners and special education students with various story-specific graphic organizers, a list of linking words, and cues for writing dialogue. However, consistent protocols do not regularly drive team meetings, limiting the team's ability to evaluate and track the quality of its work as measured against the usefulness of suggested methods and resources for individual and groups of students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Gifford 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 ongoing 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