



**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 Willis Avenue School

Elementary School 049

**383 East 139th Street
Bronx
NY 10454**

Principal: Mr. Frank Hernandez, IA

Dates of review: April 8 – 9, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Yolanda Torres

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Willis Avenue School is an elementary school with 672 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 29% Black, 69% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 19% English language learners and 22% 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 91.5%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders use the Danielson Framework for Teaching alongside other protocols to elevate teaching practices and professional conversations resulting in effective feedback leading to teacher development and growth. (4.1)
 - The school leadership uses the observation process as a means to identify teacher strengths and areas in need of support. With the implementation of the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the use of reflection sheets for teacher self-assessment of instructional delivery, there is an evidentiary shift in teacher practice leading to meaningful discussions between leaders and teachers for continuous professional growth. School leaders use their low inference notes on classroom observations to hold candid conversations with teachers provide timely feedback that helps them focus immediately on next steps for improvement. Based on these observations, school leaders have made changes to teacher assignments to ensure that students receive adequate instructional support. These professional exchanges further challenge teachers to deepen their knowledge via consultant or coach support, peer inter-visitations, mentoring, study groups, and weekly meetings for planning, inquiry or looking at student work. Strategic professional development sessions with a lens on the Danielson competencies provide teachers and school leaders with a common language and expectations to improve their practice and build capacity. Furthermore, the rigorous feedback loop has led to the identification of teacher leaders across grades. These 'instructional leads' vary from new teachers to those with years of experience, thus creating a cadre of educators ready to learn from each other and re-energized to support their colleagues. They focus on research-based literature and professional books for instructional growth. This shared accountability affords the opportunity to share practices resulting in a cohesive understanding on how to support student learning. Also, teachers' participation in instructional rounds promotes collegiality and professional learning, hence, bridging teacher knowledge and community-building which is a cultural shift where this professional learning community is leading the way towards pedagogical improvement academic success.
- School leaders and teachers make purposeful decisions that build coherence in Common Core aligned curricula and content standards so that all students have access to rigorous tasks that promote cognitive engagement. (1.1)
 - The school uses the CCLS-aligned curricula, *ReadyGen* and *Go Math*, as resources that integrate the instructional shifts across grades. At the initial implementation of these curricula, a collection of qualitative data, such as pre- and post- student work to assess student growth as well as class discussions on solving problems in multiple ways with the tracking of questions asked by teachers, took place so that teachers can provide feedback on the impact on student learning and the alignment to the school's belief on how students learn best via the workshop model. School leaders provided teachers with a forum to share their opinions on the initial curricula outcomes. Teachers' voices were heard and a

concerted decision-making process took place in curricula changes and/or adjustments to better meet the needs of all students. The primary shift focuses on the acquisition of vocabulary and on-level text exposure so that students' knowledge-base is enriched with tiered language and complex text to build critical thinking skills. As a result of the ongoing analysis of student work, the school-wide writing curriculum has been enhanced with elements of a particular genre such as narrative writing to build stamina. In order to promote higher order thinking skills as well as access and equity for all learners, school leaders have been strategic in their feedback to teachers ensuring that adjustments made to curricula and lesson plans promote the active participation of students in accordance to their learning styles and points of entry. During the regularly scheduled teacher team meetings, there is a clear expectation amongst all teachers to ensure that their conversations and collaborative work remain focused on curricula adjustment suitable to students' needs for overall success. This is accomplished by the use of the Understanding by Design (UbD) Framework for refining units of study. As a result of these efforts, all learners have access to rigorous curricula and tasks, thus demonstrating higher order thinking skills in their student work products.

- Organizational decisions effectively support the school-wide instructional goals resulting in improved student outcomes evident in student work products. (1.3)
 - Budgetary decisions reflect the school-wide vision of providing teachers and students with the necessary teaching and learning opportunities to close the achievement gap. Targeted support is aligned to the goals and action plans of the school's Comprehensive Education Plan. Outside consultants, network personnel, and coaches are assigned to work closely with teachers to build capacity. Students participate in frequent small group instructional sessions, after school enrichment activities, extracurricular clubs, math boot camp, and Saturday Academy so that they engage in instructional supports that will assist in their learning. Cluster teachers are assigned a daily 35-minute period where they push-in to classes to provide targeted instruction to students. The instructional coach works with assigned teachers in 6-8 week cycles to provide customized professional support. Departmentalization of upper grade classes is a new initiative well received by teachers and students. Teachers have experienced an improvement in their content knowledge as they deepen their planning and work with students. Being able to teach the same content twice on a daily basis provides teachers with self-reflection and assessment of their pedagogy and student understanding resulting in subsequent adjustments. School leaders' student grouping and teacher observations have led to these teacher assignment changes resulting in improved student outcomes. Subsequent ongoing classroom visitations and observations have shown improvement in student engagement and teacher practice, therefore, providing school leaders with positive feedback on the changes made.
- The school is a learning community that conveys high expectations to staff, students and families leading to a system of accountability for all stakeholders. (3.4)

- The new leader has been highly visible throughout the building getting to know staff, students and families. His presence in classrooms conveys a message to teachers and students of the importance of teaching and learning and the expected instructional outcomes. Providing students with opportunities to speak in community forums about their interests and goals has motivated students to look at their education as a path towards reaching a higher level of learning. Students enthusiastically share these learned expectations with their parents at home which, thus shifting the conversations from *what* they have learned to *why* they learn. In addition, parents participate in school-sponsored workshops to engage in understanding the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards, the City-wide Instructional Expectations and the Adult Learning Institute where they learn English as a second language, math, early literacy skills, Cook Shop and the use of technology as a learning tool. Parents state that the new principal has brought joy to learning in their children and a sense of responsibility of maintaining focus on their educational growth. They appreciate staff availability to address the emotional issues that affect their children as well as their household by providing strategies and/or suggesting services that can assist in moving forward. As they have conversations with their children on what they are learning, they can hear and see how they understand specific concepts at school as they make connections to real experiences at home. Teachers and parents meet regularly to discuss high expectations and parents' role of accountability for these expectations in the academic and emotional growth of their children. The school-wide quote: "*Encourage your child to reach the clouds*" is a daily reminder of the responsibility of every stakeholder, thus ensuring that the children's education is well-supported and is a priority and one of quality.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine systems to ensure that all teachers use common assessment results to provide consistent actionable feedback to students resulting in academic mastery and intellectual independence. (2.2)
 - The school uses a variety of assessments such as running records, exit slips, checklists, conferences notes, and tests to assess student performance and ensure that students are progressing towards their individual goals. Leaders meet with teachers to discuss formative and summative assessment results for next steps towards improvement. Pre- and post-assessments have been changed or adjusted to meet the students' needs. Student goals are adjusted in response to teacher conference notes and feedback on student work. These teacher formative assessments lead to students providing feedback to their peers during their turn and talks or small group work through the use of rubrics and checklists. The school-designed progress reports inform families on student progress, but also serve as important data-driven information that results in lesson adjustments and differentiated instruction. Although all practices and learning are monitored and evaluated via visitations and observations in order to ensure consistency and coherence based on common assessment results, there are instances of uneven teacher understanding of how to use these results to move student learning, thus limiting opportunities for all students to demonstrate increased mastery.

- Strengthen teacher pedagogy to ensure that effective scaffolds further provide all learners with differentiated entry points for higher levels of student thinking and participation. (1.2)
 - Students' access to quality education paired with a keen focus on multiple entry points and learning styles is the school's core belief on how students learn best. The importance of implementing a variety of instructional techniques such as the use of technology as a tool for students to explain their mathematical thinking through visual representation provides learners and teachers with vital information on how some students conceptualize and problem solve. Also, in some classrooms, the use of visuals and questioning techniques help students visualize and think critically and provide students with opportunities to discuss their work. As students turn and talk with their partners, they check for understanding and try to hold each other accountable by using a self-assessment checklist that challenges them to provide feedback to each other. Teachers working in teams deliver instruction through the parallel teaching method to hone in on students' individual needs through customized scaffolds. In addition, in some classrooms, standards are differentiated with "I can" statements with key ideas and details that help students focus on learning objectives for each lesson. Response-to-intervention teachers also push-in to classes to support at-risk students and classroom teacher strategies and next steps for individual students. However, these practices to provide targeted support so that multiple entry points are provided to all learners are not consistently evident in all classrooms leading to uneven student engagement, participation and thinking.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

| School name: The Willis Avenue 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 |