



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Quality Review
Office of School Quality
Division of Academics, Performance, and Support
2013-2014**

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Paul Laurence Dunbar

08X301

**890 Cauldwell Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Benjamin Basile

Dates of review: January 21-22, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Timothy Behr

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Paul L. Dunbar School is a middle school with 228 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 36% Black, 61% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native students. The student body includes 21% English language learners and 22% 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 87.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Common Core aligned curricula offer a wide range of academic access to students that promote productive struggles to facilitate student learning. (1.1)
 - All four core-content areas are aligned to the Common Core Standards. Students in grades 6 through 8 participate in science labwork for real world application of the scientific method. The art curriculum is aligned to the New York State Blueprint for the Arts. The English language arts curriculum includes reading more nonfiction materials. In a grade 6 classroom, students were reading a memoir, *Dream from My Father*, by Barack Obama while demonstrating the ability to use context clues to define vocabulary words. To improve speed and accuracy in math, students complete math fluency worksheets which prioritize application of multiplication skills. Science and social studies activities include essay responses to document-based questions and using text-based evidence to support their claims in writing. This emphasis on vocabulary development, close reading activities, and text-based evidence in writing in all core subjects results in a coherent approach to preparing students for high school and college as evident in improved critical thinking skills displayed in student work products.
 - Teachers meet regularly to review student work and evaluate instructional strategies to ensure the inclusion of high interest activities in curricula that cognitively engage all learners. For instance, to prepare students to support or refute claims and to invigorate student reading interest, teachers research and then present articles that are at students' independent reading levels. Hence, in a seventh grade English language arts class students were able to work independently and in small groups to identify key ideas and details in a story by using graphic organizers that were modified to address student learning needs. In an eighth grade math class special education students were observed using the game "Battleship" to enhance their understanding of plotting points. In a grade 7 science class students learned about the operational function of an animal cell by comparing it to the functional components of a factory. As a result, students have access to curricula and tasks that cognitively engage them in meaningful tasks.
- Teaching practices are aligned to the curricula, incorporate instructional shifts with multiple entry points that foster student engagement and rigorous thinking evident in student work. (1.2)
 - Administration and teachers know their students well. They can speak to their learning preferences, behavioral history, and social-emotional needs. This information informs the different learning needs of students. All core-content lessons incorporate literacy routines of reading, writing and speaking identified in a 'flow of the day' poster across classrooms. Students were observed in a productive struggle to complete classroom assignments and were engaged in individual, small group, or teacher-guided activities that were tiered based on entry points for individual students. For example, in a special education class during science some students were interpreting a picture in a textbook while other students interpreted the written content to complete the task. In English language arts, teachers prioritized strategies that help students unpack

context clues to develop vocabulary and writing to inform and to explain. In math, special education students used manipulatives to solve problems. Also, students are expected to use prior knowledge to solve complex word problems. In science, students used previously learned concepts and experiences to complete rigorous assignments. Furthermore, teacher questioning techniques require students to confirm, connect, probe, and evaluate subject content. Targeted assistance to students whether individually or within small groups is a consistent practice in classrooms. For example, in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, the special education teacher assisted students in a hands-on activity to extract DNA from a strawberry while deepening their understanding of scientific concepts through reflection by comparing and contrasting scientific concepts. In an ICT math class, students were strategically grouped based on unit exams and teacher-made assessments to determine the coordinates for a rotation of 90% and 180%. Hence, this belief system to plan for multiple entry points and varied instructional modalities results in the majority of teachers presenting lessons where student manifest higher-order thinking skills as evidenced by student work in portfolios and oral and written feedback to teachers.

- School leaders in collaboration with key building personnel make effective organizational decisions that are aligned to the school's instructional goals to improve instruction and student outcomes. (1.3)
 - The school is the recipient for a 21st Century Grant which funds the extended day program. This program enables students to learn their basic skills in order to delve into their studies with deeper interest to complete content area task assignments. Additionally, funds received by the school as a result of being identified by New York State as a Priority school are used to support a reading program for beginning English language learners. The school hired two science teachers to provide hands-on instruction that supports students' growing understanding of the scientific method. A newly hired family worker outreaches to families via home visits. As a result, student attendance has improved to 88.1% thus far this year. The school chose the curriculum Code X for English language arts and Connected Math Program 3(CMP3) in order to facilitate the implementation of the Common Core. An advisory program consists of academic remediation, health and physical education activities, a school-wide breakfast program, and a counseling team that support the mental, social, and emotional growth of students. Teacher teams meet weekly to analyze student work to develop intervention plans for students. They organize summative and periodic assessment data to correlate the student deficiencies with the expectations of the State exam. Teachers openly discuss and refine instructional change strategies to meet the needs of students. Hence, school personnel are informed of student performance status which informs more focused instructional and organizational supports as evidenced by meaningful student work products reflective of challenging tasks.
- Administrators and teachers use a wide range of assessment data to make instructional and curricula adjustments that ensure all students make academic progress. (2.2)
 - The school uses unit assessments in all core content areas to monitor student progress. In addition, teachers provide actionable feedback to students regarding their writing, investigations, reflections, and labs. Report card

grades are aligned to a school-wide grading policy based on summative assessments. Student grades reflect an accurate interpretation of the grading policy and are not inflated. Rubrics used with anchor assignments provide students with clear next steps to improve student performance. Furthermore, teacher teams emphasized the importance of re-teaching core concepts as a strategy that has improved student performance. They meet regularly to plan collaboratively. Thumbs up, cue cards, idea waves, random checks for understanding, informal questioning, and exit slips provide teachers with actionable feedback in order to tailor instruction for targeted groups of students. Students 'turn and talk' to demonstrate understanding of content. These activities result in a more coherent approach to instructional adjustments driven by ongoing assessment data. Teachers were observed providing background information and prior knowledge analogies in order to modify the delivery of instruction to meet the needs of students. Activities that involve writing and mailing letters to Derek Jeter provide students with real world learning applications. The use of summative and formative assessments has directed the school to focus on student vocabulary development, numerical fluency, expository writing, and ensuring consistent notebook entries to enhance student performance. Tasks are regularly analyzed and adjusted in a focused effort to improve student outcomes. The majority of student work displayed in hallways and classrooms demonstrate these school-wide initiatives.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen data-based goal setting to identify and track students' next learning steps, which are clearly understood by students and consistently shared with parents. (3.1)
 - School goals regarding effective teaching, curriculum implementation, effective professional development, and attendance are based on the school's summative data. The school analysis of the most recent Progress Report and Quality Review recommendations informed the administration and teachers to develop focused instructional and organizational goals. However, upon review of current school data and student portfolios there was limited evidence of goal tracking sheets and inconsistent actionable feedback to students regarding goal-setting in each unit. Consequently, students have limited understanding of goal setting and are not clear on how, why, and when they transition from one goal to the next. Hence, there are limited opportunities for differentiated goal setting and attainment to accelerate student learning.
 - The principal recognizes the need to communicate with and involve the school community to generate a broad base of support for the direction of school improvement. Currently, parental involvement at the school is extremely limited as evidenced by low turnout at Parent Teacher Association meetings, workshop, and below-average participation in completing the School Survey. Additionally, the principal recognizes the need to share the most recent data from the Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) as well as the celebration of student work at all faculty conferences, parent-teacher association meetings, school leadership meetings, and parent-teacher conferences to collaboratively develop formative next steps for goal setting. However, these practices have not gained traction, and therefore the school community is not yet actively involved in decision-making regarding school-wide goal-setting and buy-in. This hampers progress toward goal attainment.

- Improve approaches to culture-building which provide an inclusive environment and increased communication and collaboration with parents that foster the personal and academic growth of students. (1.4)
 - The school has a Positive Behavior Intervention System entitled, Personal best, Act responsible, Safety first, and Show respect (PASS) to support the social-emotional growth of students. However, there are 13 Superintendent suspensions this year to date and students report that “there is bullying and fighting regularly occurring in the school”. Students stated that, “These behaviors interfere with our learning.” Furthermore, although the school is part of the Mayor’s Initiative to reduce chronic absenteeism, 40% of the students had less than 90% attendance during the academic year 2012-13. This statistic greatly influences student outcomes as evidenced by the school being identified as a priority school by the New York State Education Department. There is a Civics Engagement Club to promote informed engagement in the school and throughout the community. However, members are in the process of finding the resources to help this club and community grow and develop in dealing with assorted socio-emotional issues of students. Although students have voice in having a Spring Talent Show and choosing food choices in the lunchroom, they also want the opportunity to enroll in eighth grade courses that would earn high school credit. Currently, this choice is not an option. Hence, not all students feel that all school experiences are rewarding nor is the school environment always safe which limits their ability to focus on academic achievement.
 - 9% of parents and 36% of students completed the 2012-2013 School Survey. Both statistics are below city average. Hence, parents and students are not active participants in learning to fully support the schools and student’s social, emotional, and academic growth. The New York City Department of Education conducted a meeting at the school during the fall 2013 to address concerns regarding the academic performance of the school during a three year period. Parent turnout was low which impedes progress in student learning. Professional development at the school has prioritized the roll out of the new core curriculums in English language arts and mathematics. Although teachers are aware of the instructional and social goals set for students there are limited opportunities to share these high expectations with parents. Parents from the school just started to attend district Parent as Partners workshops. However, there has been no representation at Parent Association President’s Executive Council monthly meetings this year. Hence, there are few opportunities for reciprocal conversations with District 8 constituents regarding their children’s learning and progress in order to move the school forward. A Trinity-Wall Street grant provides mentoring and an art activity to extend classroom learning outside of school hours. However, student participation in this activity is limited so it is difficult to evaluate impact on student outcomes. Although the principal recognizes the need to coordinate more opportunities for parents to become active participants in their children’s learning, such opportunities are not yet in place, thus hampering student learning experiences that support effective academic and personal behaviors.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Paul L. Dunbar	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