

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Luisa Dessus Cruz School

08X302

**681 Kelly Street
Bronx
NY 10455**

Principal: Liza Ortiz

Dates of review: November 12-13, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Luisa Dessus Cruz is a middle school with 598 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 24% Black, 75% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 21% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 87.5%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Using student work and data, the school has developed units of study aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and instructional shifts to ensure that all learners access engaging curricula that fuels their academic growth. (1.1)
 - Lesson plans, unit maps and tasks show that the school's curricula require students to engage in extensive writing activities, citing textual evidence to support analysis of readings from nonfiction texts, composing explanations of inferences drawn from texts, and preparing summaries of reading selections. Curriculum maps for all content areas show essential questions, embedded assessments, and tasks that reflect the instructional shifts. Based on a "Word Generation" initiative linked to the school's participation in the Middle School Quality Initiative, curriculum units also show a deep focus on academic vocabulary across content and grades. An instructional handbook for each content area shows detailed CCLS aligned units and tasks, derived from revisions of past units, modification of lessons from Engage NY, and the Common Core Library, and the adoption of new curriculum resources such as CMP Math and Codex. Thus, there is coherence of curricula across the school.
 - Administrators, coaches, mentors, and lead teachers, facilitate planning sessions that focus on crafting performance tasks, and using student work and data to identify types of supports needed for English language learners and students with disabilities. Unit maps show that teachers design units of study with scaffolding and modifications, to insure that all students develop the capacity to understand content that is intellectually stimulating. For example, an English language arts unit on Human Trafficking required students to use graphic organizers and select from a range of tasks, to provide their own examples of "Human Trafficking in the 21st century", and discuss ways in which society can combat this practice. Similarly, a math task challenged students to choose from academic vocabulary such as "factor, multiple, distributive property, exponents" and "composite", and combine them in their own way, to write an essay about characteristics of their favorite number. The design of these activities allows students access to curricula that stretches their thinking.
- School staff effectively collaborate to create an environment characterized by a range of social emotional learning support services that promote students' personal and academic growth. (1.4)
 - Adult mentors get to know students well, tracking academic progress, sharing students' concerns, and engaging in outreach to families, especially for the most at-risk students, including overage students and frequently absent students. Response to Intervention (RTI) staff team up with guidance counselors, the parent coordinator, and other staff, to work with students and families in implementing attendance and behavior intervention plans that strengthen academic and social-emotional growth. School staff also partner with community-based organizations such as City Year and Episcopalian Social Services, to provide day and after-school academic and social emotional learning programs that include tutoring, homework help, dance,

drama, sports, music, art, community service projects, and clubs. There are assemblies by grade and gender to foster positive behaviors by all students. The principal's "Beautiful" and "Cute Girls" initiatives build self-esteem for female students, and individualized programming, with individual learning plans for all eighth grade students support their readiness for high school. These structures have helped to improve scholarship and student conduct, as evidenced by pre- and post-unit assessment data and student and teacher interviews.

- Teachers are trained to support the school's Positive Behavior Interventions Support (PBIS) program, and use behavior management tools such as detention and section sheets to hold students accountable for their behavior. Staff members also learn from working with each other to design postings that line the hallways, reminding students to adopt positive behaviors espoused by a multi-tiered honor roll system, a school wide Behavior Expectations Matrix, and a "Students Who Achieve Greatness" (SWAG) initiative. Teachers are supported by administrators in reinforcing positive behaviors via "Acknowledging Success" forms, PBIS dollars for students to shop for goodies at the school's PBIS store, and movie tickets for selected students. Parents reported that the school engages them as partners in learning, via monthly events' calendars, workshops, school messenger phone calls, progress reports, and information sent home or displayed on Jupiter Grades, the school's online data reporting system. According to the principal, these supports have helped to reduce incidents and improve attendance, thus contributing to the school's movement to a B for student progress on the 2013 Progress Report, up from a C, in 2012.
- Administrators effectively communicate high expectations to staff, students, and families, promoting students' progress towards college and career readiness goals. (3.4)
 - To expand teacher capacity in delivering effective instruction, all teachers receive feedback on their performance in relation to best practices highlighted by the Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching. Additionally, through individual and team discussions at grade, department, and common planning meetings, they receive comprehensive professional development support linked to their needs as reflected by the Framework. Lesson plan templates, instructional handbooks, bi-weekly bulletins, content area newsletters, curriculum maps, conference logs, data collection sheets, templates for analyzing student work, homework logs, and other tools developed by staff and administrators, are distributed to all staff to specify the school's high expectations for instruction, communication, and professionalism by all. In collaboration with network staff and instructional leads, administrators use conference notes, reviews of unit and lesson plans, feedback from observations, and periodic analyses of student work products, to hold staff accountable for those expectations. As a result, the school has cultivated a learning culture that continually raises the bar for high quality work by all staff.
 - Administrators engage families in creating learning goals focused on their children's needs, with parents acknowledging the goals through a sign-off process. Through orientation sessions, agenda books, open houses by grade, Friday forums, content area workshops, staff conferences, and course syllabi sent home, the school supports families in understanding what students need to do to attain those goals and succeed in high school and

college. Further, the Jupiter online data portal provides families with information about their children's progress towards goals. Students stated that they "have to work hard because our parents can see our grades any time and get a message right away if we miss any work". Parents noted that the school builds their awareness of college requirements by counseling them about admissions and applications, engaging them in researching colleges, and inviting them to high school fairs and school sponsored trips to colleges. They spoke highly of the many tools that the school uses to "keep everyone on the same page about grades, conduct, attendance, high school, and college plans".

- School leaders place a high priority on regular observation of teacher pedagogy, constructive feedback, and multi-dimensional supports that promote growth in teacher practice. (4.1)
 - Administrators observe teachers regularly to measure their progress in relation to goals outlined in individual teacher improvement plans, and to promote ongoing assessment of teacher growth. Mentors provide personalized support and feedback to new teachers and through tools such as e-mails, one-to-one conversations, low inference transcripts, logs of assistance, intervisitations, peer feedback logs, lesson plan clinics, and video reviews of lessons, all teachers receive feedback that details next steps for improving their instructional practice. Administrators also hold meetings with teachers to examine student work products and identify aspects of instruction that must be improved. A Teacher Effectiveness Ambassador's Grant provides funding for related professional development activities, thus supporting the school in sustaining a culture of ongoing professional growth for all teachers.
 - Teacher delivery of effective instruction provides evidence of the school deeply embedding the Danielson Framework for Teaching into all aspects of instruction. Via feedback from observations of competencies outlined in the Framework, administrators encourage teachers to monitor and assess the impact of their instruction and use this information to implement suggested next steps. Additionally, school leaders use observation data to assess teacher impact on student outcomes and to norm expectations for teacher practice across the school. Through frequent surveys and an observation-tracking tool, administrators monitor teacher progress and gauge the impact of their feedback on teacher growth. Consequently, feedback systems enhance teacher development, leading to increased mastery of the targeted domains, as evidenced by teacher reports and observation data.

What the school needs to improve

- Sharpen teacher capacity to regularly incorporate student-to-student interactions and effective questioning and discussion in lessons, to ensure high levels of thinking and active participation by all students. (1.2)
 - Across classrooms, teachers assign rigorous CCLS aligned tasks requiring evidence to support claims or counterclaims. For example, in an English classroom, the teachers asked students to use textual evidence from a variety of related non-fiction articles to support their opinions about materials read. However, in two classrooms, lessons did not demonstrate sufficient multiple entry points to meet students' diverse needs, with limited reading,

writing and speaking opportunities for students, including English language learners and students with disabilities. In addition, in a few classrooms, tasks were of low demand, with students reading short excerpts of texts and the teacher calling on volunteers to answer a few low level questions. As a result, not all students benefit from teaching practices that consistently engage them in producing work that requires high-level thinking.

- Across the school, lessons show a focus on questioning to support whole class, individual and small group discussion of topics. Some teachers provide prompts in questioning students and students take turns responding. However, the practice of inviting students to comment on responses given by their peers is not sufficiently evident, and for the most part, discussions are teacher dominated, with students quietly listening to the teacher or to responses from a few peers who are called upon. Further, although some lessons facilitate student participation, student-to-student discussion is not the norm. As a result, not all students participate actively in discussions characterized by peer-to-peer dialogue and thought-provoking questioning that deepen their thinking and learning.
- Refine assessment practices to ensure ongoing checks for understanding and generate actionable feedback that drives student self-assessment and effective adjustments to curriculum and instruction for all learners. (2.2)
 - Data displays on bulletin boards, spreadsheets, and other documents in assessment binders, show that administrators and teachers track student progress and have criteria that focus attention on what staff and students need to do to ensure success for all learners. Staff and students share feedback on assessments, via proficiency reports, individual conferences, and logs of progress. Portfolio assessment and exit slips offer additional insights about students' learning needs and inform adjustments to instruction and curriculum. However, a review of students' notebooks, work folders, and work samples on bulletin boards show a multi-tiered system of teacher feedback to students. Some samples of student work show rubric-based performance level scores with comments on post-its, others show checkmarks with comments, including next steps, and at other times, there are check marks with no comments. Thus, feedback is not always actionable, nor does it consistently yield an accurate snapshot of students' progress towards mastery of learning goals.
 - Using a "Wows, Wonders, and Trends" protocol, teachers engage in analyses of student work to inform plans for instruction in the skills students need to master content across core disciplines. Teachers use item analysis data to measure student progress on individual and department goals and determine next steps for revising plans to improve student progress. However, evidence of ongoing assessment practices such as peer and self-assessment, turn-and-talks, and whole class share-outs or presentations was inconsistent in classrooms. As a result, teachers do not have sufficient information by which to adjust instructional practices to ensure that students' needs are targeted accurately and addressed effectively.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Luisa Dessus Cruz	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 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X				
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to 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 support 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 them?				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 students' 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 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?			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