Citywide Instructional Expectations Case Study
Guiding Questions

Overview

The 2014-15 Citywide Instructional Expectations help schools reflect upon and refine their practice in order to prepare all students to graduate college and career ready. One strategy for reflecting on practice is to examine how other schools have approached their work. These case studies offer insights on how teachers, school leaders and field support staff make decisions and engage stakeholders to develop school-wide practices to strengthen student achievement.

Case study schools have strong practices in building coherence among their culture, structures, and instructional core. The school communities voluntarily and generously shared their work in order to develop case studies that:
- Reflect authentic practice in a New York City school
- Include resources or artifacts from the school
- Connect to one or more of the 2014-15 Citywide Instructional Expectations components: Knowledge of Students, Instructional Focus, Collaborative Professional Learning

Guiding Questions: Instructional Focus

From the 2014-15 Citywide Instructional Expectations: An instructional focus is a school-determined priority that integrates multiple initiatives into a cohesive vision for strengthening student achievement. It is rooted in the school's needs and has a direct and evident impact on classroom practice. An instructional focus is developed after examining multiple sources of information, including the strengths and needs of students. It brings cohesion to a school's goal-setting process, comprehensive education plan, teacher and administrator development goals, and decisions about resource allocation. It is emphasized throughout the work of the school, including in school-wide professional development plans, the observation and feedback cycle, and communication with families.

1. What information in this case study suggests how the instructional focus is embedded in:
   - Structures
   - Professional Learning
   - Resources
   - School Culture
   - Classroom Practices

2. How has this school's instructional focus impacted students?

3. What decisions did the school leader make to support implementation of an instructional focus?

4. What questions does this study raise? What data or evidence would you like to add?

5. What practices does your school have in place that support the implementation of the instructional focus?

6. What systems and structures do you need to refine to better implement the instructional focus?

Potential Next Steps: Team activities and tools on the Common Core Library
- School Reflection Protocol
- Instructional Focus Development Tool

Raising Expectations One School at a Time

Six Case Studies of the Work of New York City Schools in Light of the District's 2012-13 Citywide Instructional Expectations

Septima Clark Elementary School:
Individualizing Instruction with Focused Collaboration

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Introduction

Septima Clark Elementary School: Individualizing Instruction with Focused Collaboration is one of six case studies in a series exploring how a select group of New York City schools are functioning in light of the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE). In 2012-13, New York launched its second year of these Expectations, asking school leaders and teachers to "adjust their practice as they work together to understand the learning needs of all students...in order to support them in developing the qualities and skills necessary to enroll, persist, and succeed in college and careers."

To better understand what this work looks like in practice, six schools were selected for in-depth study during the second half of the 2012-13 school year. Eskolta identified these schools based on Quality Review (QR) data that suggested they had experienced moderate success with implementation of the CIE (according to QR indicators aligned to the CIE), along with socioeconomic data that suggested they served a proportion of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch that was equal to or greater than the average of all NYC schools. The research across all six schools was conducted by a team of two researchers and included 107 interviews and 91 observations over five months.

While this study provides insight into schools' implementation of practices in their efforts to align to the CIE, it is neither intended to establish the impact of the CIE, nor is the fact that a particular practice is highlighted at a school intended to imply that that practice is encouraged by the CIE or the NYC Department of Education. Rather, the report is designed to investigate two research hypotheses: first, that schools that see the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) as two integrated parts of one initiative are able to create meaningful change in teacher practice; and second, that guided by the CIE, schools can take actions to improve student work and teacher practice. Five themes emerged across these case studies:

❶ **Setting a Schoolwide Approach.** Effective integration of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the Common Core Learning Standards, both central elements of the CIE, improved with a schoolwide approach independently established by the school.

❷ **Promoting Adult Learning.** Changes in teacher practice arose when leaders promoted a culture of adult learning that highlighted internal needs over external pressures.

❸ **Sustaining Critical Thinking.** Instructional shifts pushed student learning when teachers coupled higher-order questioning with attention to academic behaviors.

❹ **Enabling Regular Instructional Adjustments.** Students experienced multiple paths to rigorous learning when school structures allowed for frequent assessment to drive strategic groupings.

❺ **Optimizing Systems for Collaboration.** Collaborative inquiry became central to teacher practice when leadership provided objectives and focused schedules on a common curricular area.

This particular case study of a New York City elementary school is comprised of four brief stories, each of which ties to at least one theme. These are outlined on the next page.

The case study is based on research conducted during approximately 28 hours of visits to Septima Clark Elementary School between February and May 2013, including thirteen interviews (with twelve teachers, one principal, one assistant principal, and one network administrator) and sixteen observations. In order to encourage participation and candor, confidentiality was guaranteed to all study participants. All participants provided informed consent per Institutional Review Board guidelines and all names have been changed to protect confidentiality. (For more detail, see Study Methodology in *Part I: Themes, Implications, and Methodology.*)

Septima Clark Elementary School

Septima Clark Elementary School, the only school in a large building on the corner of a residential block in a working-class community, has over 600 students. About three-quarters of students receive free and reduced price lunch, slightly over ten percent qualify for special education services, and only a small proportion are English language learners. The vast majority are African-American; the remaining under ten percent are White or Hispanic. The teaching staff has longevity, both in the profession and at the school; some members of the staff have even worked at Septima Clark for decades. The average teacher has over ten years of experience, and no teacher at the school has taught for less than three years. While teacher turnover is virtually non-existent, many teachers do move between different grades from one year to the next.

At Septima Clark, the administration's emphasis is on translating a set of schoolwide goals to grade-level and classroom goals. The influence of the Citywide Instructional Expectations can be seen in efforts to build common practice and common language across the school through grade-level teams that have been scheduled with significant time to meet, plan, and look at student work together. This is coupled with intentional efforts by teachers to provide differentiation within each heterogeneously-grouped class through the use of formative assessment and questioning techniques highlighted in the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

Examining the individual and collective efforts of the first-grade team offers insight into how teachers in a non-testing grade work to support every child to learn new strategies and strengthen their literacy and math skills. From phonics rules to context clues, from using manipulatives to counting tens, teachers offer students a "toolbox" of strategies. The first-grade teachers have a diversity of teaching experience and skills and, supported by structures initiated by the school's leadership, they collaborate extensively around curriculum and instruction, meeting regularly in addition to their scheduled times. Their weekly inquiry team meetings relate to literacy and focus on student work and sharing professional literature that they use to inform their practice.

The four stories that comprise this case study each highlight different aspects of this work and tie back to one or more of the five themes that emerged across the entire research study.

Pages	Title	Themes	Focus
4-5	Building a Coherent Instructional Vision	❶ setting a schoolwide approach	Leadership anticipated CCLS shifts and, with network support, instilled a shared language and vision around curriculum and instruction that builds higher-order critical thinking.
6-7	From Vision to Individualized Reality in the Classroom	❸ sustaining critical thinking	Explicit teaching of strategies and student self-reflection about strategies are key to the school's instructional approach.
8-10	Establishing Structures for Collaborative Planning	❺ optimizing collaboration ❷ promoting adult learning	Teachers consistently focus their grade-level collaboration and conversation on instruction and assessment. Supported by a common schedule, they meet with their teammates during almost every lunch and prep time.
11-13	Helping Each Student Reach High Expectations	❹ enabling instructional adjustments	Teachers use a workshop model, incorporating small group instruction into every lesson and implementing a variety of formative assessment tools and strategies.

Building a Coherent Instructional Vision

At Septima Clark Elementary, leadership anticipated the CCLS shifts and, with network support, instilled a shared language and vision around curriculum and instruction that builds higher-order critical thinking. In addition, engaging teachers in reading and discussing professional literature keeps the focus on instructional strategies rather than test preparation. [key theme: ❶ **setting a schoolwide approach**]

In many ways, the administrators at Septima Clark Elementary have been preparing the school for the shifts called for in the CIE long before its initial iteration in 2011. Ms. Hawkins and Ms. Johnson, the principal and assistant principal of the school, share that their beliefs about effective teaching and learning are well-represented in the Common Core Learning Standards. A few years ago, they started attending workshops held by their network to introduce the CCLS. Ms. Johnson explains their thinking about how they have worked to engage teachers in schoolwide efforts to improve curriculum and instruction: "How can we present this to teachers in a non-threatening way? It's a great opportunity for us to be on the same page."

To achieve coherence in response to the CCLS, administration has framed the work to teachers as a challenge of developing and refining a strongly student-centered instructional approach aimed at higher-order thinking. While they report that some teachers are learning and growing faster than others, keeping the focus on children helps the school's leaders to work constructively with their experienced staff members who might otherwise feel resistant to new initiatives. "We don't have high teacher turnover. Most people are moving along. It really is about the students," says Ms. Johnson. In turn, teachers express an appreciation for the efforts of administration to unify the staff around these shifts early on. A veteran SCS teacher shares, "They're very smart about curriculum. We've been unpacking the Common Core for about four years now. Everything we do has to be aligned and with purpose."

While the new CCLS-aligned New York State Tests are on everyone's minds, the leadership deliberately works to maintain the school's focus on teaching and learning as distinct from preparation for tests. Ms. Hawkins explains, "We haven't really pushed the conversation 'The test is coming.' Teachers have to be able to teach." Ms. Johnson adds, "We keep the schedule the same. We're not taking away science and social studies before the test." The results of this effort are clear. Rather than trying to anticipate what will be tested, teachers explain how they plan their lessons based on their set of existing goals, derived at the beginning of the year and modified over time based on the needs of individual students. While the administration's attitude and approach lessens the pressure of the upcoming state tests, given the uncertainty in this first year of the new CCLS-aligned tests, teachers do express some apprehension along with a desire for more CCLS resources. An upper-grade teacher describes how hard it is to find the materials they need, "We just have to get more current with what's out there, and that's what we've been searching for. We're like scavenger hunters; we're looking for everything."

One aspect of leadership's approach to building and maintaining a shared focus on how children learn is to also engage teachers as professional learners. Ms. Hawkins notes, "The entire staff reads a book all year; it often comes up in conversation, or we say, 'For Monday, we'll be talking about chapter three.'" In the Teacher Room, teachers' reflections on articles from *Educational Leadership* hang alongside posters of CCLS DOE instructional shifts. Whether discussing the book *Rigor Is Not a Four-Letter Word*, or analyzing articles focused on strategies to comprehend complex text, staff throughout the school are collectively building a shared language and vision around instruction that is consistently drawn back to the school's focused guiding principles.

As called for in the CIE, the school has made specific use this year of the Danielson *Framework*, and specifically Competency 3b, using questioning and discussion techniques. Teachers are developing their

approaches to questioning and administrators provide targeted feedback and support around their efforts. Ms. Hawkins and Ms. Johnson visit classrooms frequently, even popping in informally. One teacher relates, "When observed, they tell us what they're looking for. It's not like, 'I gotcha.' They sit with you, break it down."

Some teachers also express appreciation for the Danielson *Framework*. A first grade teacher explains how it helps teachers to keep striving to improve their instruction, "Danielson does help. You don't know what you don't know. It lifts the level of what you do because you're paying attention." Another teacher agrees that this type of support has helped, "We've done a lot of work with Danielson this year. Questioning techniques are lifting the levels of thinking."

Much of the general sentiment across the school is summarized in a teacher's explanation of how Ms. Hawkins' belief that every child can and will succeed drives the work they do: "We're not pie in the sky; it's a lot of work. Teachers work this hard because expectations are really high here; there are high expectations for children in this building. She wants you to buy into that. She's tough. It's not the situation where you come, collect a paycheck, and go home. But she does a lot to build community."

From Vision to Individualized Reality in the Classroom

Explicit teaching of strategies, accompanied by ongoing student reflection about the strategies they use, is a key aspect of the instructional approach at Septima Clark Elementary School. Using questions to advance thinking, supported by the Danielson *Framework*, has specifically helped teachers to improve their practice this year. [key theme: ❸ **sustaining critical thinking**]

Listening to Septima Clark teachers discuss their instructional approaches, it is evident that much of their shared language focuses on empowering students with strategies for higher-order thinking and tasks. Across grade levels and subject area instruction, teachers consistently emphasize the strategies children need to use to find information, solve problems, and communicate their ideas. Illustrated "toolbox" charts listing strategies to help emergent readers, such as "tricky words" or "chunking," are displayed in every first-grade classroom:

> Spell the word out loud!
>
> Get your mouth ready to make the first sound.
>
> Slide through the whole word.
>
> Try a different vowel sound.
>
> Look at the pictures.
>
> "Chunk" it.
>
> Reread… Does it look right? Does it sound right?

Other charts ask guiding questions: "Readers use more than one tool to figure it out: Does it make sense? Does it look right? Does it sound right? Can the pictures help me? What do I know that can help?"

Such explicitness around strategies for students to explain their thinking is also present in a first-grade math lesson on subtracting tens:

> Ms. Cowart asks, "What can we use to help us solve $43 - 10 = \quad$?"
>
> Children immediately respond: "The hundreds chart."
>
> "The number line."
>
> They list manipulatives: "Longs."
>
> "Your fingers."
>
> Ms. Cowart asks them to explain how they would use those tools.
>
> They reply: "You can subtract ten from 40 and add the three on your fingers."
>
> "You can draw a number line and X off the numbers."
>
> She probes, "How many would you X off?"
>
> This child knows to start by "taking away" tens and answers, "10."
>
> Ms. Cowart suggests another tool, "What about on the 100s chart?"
>
> "You count backwards."
>
> "Another way?" She puts her finger on 43, "What do I do now?"

"You just move up."

"YES! There are different ways to solve this problem. Now try the next five on your own."

Each time a child offers an answer, Ms. Cowart asks, "What strategy did you use to solve the problem?"

"I started on 24 and went 2 tens up and got 4."

She regularly affirms her students' thinking: "Nice, I like how you explained that."

The language of the CCLS and Webb's Depth of Knowledge are implicit not only in a math class, but across the school. A fifth grade teacher explains, "In math, we focus on reasoning skills. They solve multi-step problems and write explanations."

Students across the school are learning to summarize and annotate as they read. First-grade teachers use the Stop-and-Jot strategy. A third grade teacher explains how to take notes during reading, "I tell them, 'As adult readers, we write little notes on the side of the text. That's what you guys have to do, too.' I also teach what I call, 'one-word notes.' You read a paragraph and you summarize it very quickly with just one word—what did it say? That seems to be helping them a lot. They can hold onto the meaning." The focus on strategies also gives teachers opportunities to push students to be persistent and use a variety of strategies. A third-grade teacher says, "With my kids you can't rush. 'One way of doing it didn't work, let me show you another way.' My kids know to use more than one strategy because you're not going to get every answer one way."

Ms. Hamlin's class is reading *No, David!*, and she has been working with students on making inferences. She uses questions to push their thinking beyond initial impressions of the story:

"Your job as a clue finder, an investigator, is to infer—make sense of what the author is saying. Remember the white carpet and the mud and how his head was down? What was the author trying to tell you?"

"He was sad; he was unhappy."

"Why?"

"Because he did something bad."

"What kind of a person was David?"

"Bad but then he grows up to be good."

"Really? Was David a bad person?" After a few more specific questions, the children agree with their teacher that, "David wanted to do good things but he didn't. And it doesn't make him a bad person."

Ms. Forte, a veteran first grade teacher, reflects on how the teachers have introduced their first-graders to sophisticated questioning techniques: "We do a lot more with inferencing and questioning. Do you agree, disagree? And *why*? What are you wondering about? What do you have questions about? It's higher level questioning around self-to-text, making connections, using pictures and schema to make inferences. We're teaching them the language to use: I think… Probably… I infer..." Ms. Forte sees the impact of this targeted work, "We have a culture of questions now."

Establishing Structures for Collaborative Planning

Teachers at Septima Clark Elementary work closely in grade-level teams throughout the year. Supported by a common schedule, they can be seen meeting with their teammates during almost every lunch and prep time. Whether they are setting grade-level and classroom goals or using weekly inquiry group meetings to look at student work and shape planning, teachers consistently focus their collaboration and conversation on instruction and assessment. To facilitate planning, each teacher on a grade-level team takes the primary curricular responsibility for one subject area, resulting in teachers being self-directed and accountable to each other. Teachers regularly provide lesson plans and resources in their subject area for the monthly unit and for the upcoming week. [key themes: ❺ **optimizing collaboration** + ❷ **promoting adult learning**]

In past years, teachers at Septima Clark Elementary School met with colleagues from other grade levels to engage in vertical planning. This year, though, the leadership decided to emphasize grade teams to deepen collaboration around student learning. "We wanted to focus on a need within the grade. Conversations can go more in depth and they bounce ideas off each other more," explains Ms. Hawkins. Each grade team first identified an instructional focus specific to the needs of its grade level and students. Looking at data on students' strengths and needs, along with meeting with the teachers in the next grade to discuss what students will need to know and be able to do, enabled teachers to choose a focus that was not directed by their own interests. "The teacher teams mostly saw and identified the same things we did," says Ms. Hawkins, "We're getting buy-in for the goals."

In order to further focus goal-setting on the concepts and skills teachers intend for their students to develop, every teacher identifies three to five academic goals for his or her class at the beginning of the year, posting those objectives on or next to their classroom doors.

> The chart outside a first-grade class reads: "We will build our reading comprehension skills through in-depth character study. We 'write for readers.' Our writing will 'sound right' and make sense. We will utilize different strategies to add within 20."

> A fifth-grade class poster states: "For the year 2012-13, students will work hard to: Build critical thinking skills; Build reading stamina; Practice math concepts repeatedly to achieve mastery; Lift their reading and writing levels through higher level thinking; Develop academically as well as socially in the school environment."

Many of these class goals are developmentally appropriate and directly aligned to CCLS. For example, the first-grade character study listed above reflects CCLS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.3 and CCLS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.9, which ask first graders to use key ideas and details and integrate knowledge and ideas as related to the descriptions and experiences of characters in a story. The math goal is represented in CCLS.Math.Content.1.OA.C.6, which specifies a variety of strategies that will help first-graders develop fluency for addition and subtraction within 20. Whether setting goals in grade teams or for students in each class, teachers take into account skills, concepts, strategies, and even academic and personal behaviors that will enable their students to progress as learners.

Grade teams are scheduled to meet two times per week to advance their grade-level instructional focus area. Each team sets its own agenda for their inquiry group meetings, often using this time to look at student work. Teacher leaders on each grade ensure that their team creates a list of items to address and follows through with their next steps. Each teacher also identifies five students in his or her class to focus on for a specified period of

time. An upper-grade teacher explains how her team chooses which students are in need of extra support: "We use the CCLS task and select five kids to focus on, five Level 2 kids because we want to move them from Level 2 to Level 3 [on their NY State test scores]. For the next task, we choose another five kids."

The first-grade team's weekly inquiry team meetings relate directly to reading instruction and focus on trends in student work, or, at times, on the growth of one or more of the five target students that each teacher has selected to "follow." Their work around reading this year has enabled them to deepen their understanding of children's literacy development and the teaching strategies needed to nurture and challenge every child to be a "good reader." A peek into a typical meeting illustrates teachers' level of focus on their students:

> On a Tuesday afternoon in late February, all of the first-grade teachers arrive on time for their weekly inquiry group. After wishing one member of the team a happy birthday, they find seats around the table, make sure that everyone has the meeting agenda and shared reading, and get right to work.

> The facilitator reminds everyone to take out their conferring notes and says, "Last week we were looking at conference notes and how we use them for instruction. Today, we're talking about guided reading notes, too."

> A teacher begins the conversation by describing one of her students who continues to struggle, "I focus on helping him use strategies. He relies heavily on pictures, and usually focuses on just one strategy. I have to remind him that if chunking isn't working, move on to the next strategy. He moved from D to E [according to Fountas and Pinnell reading levels]."

> Another teacher jumps in, "But chunking might not work for D/E. That's more about working with bigger words—J. Maybe reduce the strategies? Make more of those little charts, like cheat sheets, on their desks."

> After the facilitator makes sure that every teacher has had a chance to talk about the student they targeted for support, the teacher who shared a guided reading article asks if everyone had gotten a chance to read it.

> One of her colleagues nods appreciatively, "The article is basically exactly what we do in our classrooms!"

One first-grade teacher shares, "Last year, we were more looking at five students to move from Level 2 to 3. This year has been more about using conferring notes, comprehension quizzes, and Running Records to look for trends and patterns across kids. We ask ourselves, what strategies are they struggling with? Based on the findings in our inquiry group we plan literacy small groups." They supplement this work with professional articles and connect the strategies and theories presented there to the children they work with every day. They leave their discussions with next steps for small group instruction and interventions they plan to initiate or continue with individual students.

In addition to inquiry group work, teachers on every grade collaborate extensively around curriculum development and lesson planning. To facilitate their planning, all grade-level teams are set up with each teacher taking the primary curricular responsibility for a subject area. Teachers report satisfaction with the efficiency of this division of labor and how it has increased the depth of their planning, as it requires each teacher to include enough details, questions, and resources for their plans to be useful to their teammates. One teacher reflects, "Our lesson plans are very detailed. I want to know exactly what I'm teaching so we give materials to each other. We want everything to be in sync. It works out."

Schedules and agendas are purposefully designed to support additional interaction and collaboration. A third-grade teacher describes her team's patterns of meeting, "Common prep every day. Lunch together every day. So we're meeting during prep and during lunch." Another team stays every Friday to plan together to prepare for

the following week. Ms. Hawkins and Ms. Johnson encourage teams to set the best structures for themselves, and try to support and organize the work when they can. One teacher shares, "Administrators come observe meetings and give suggestions. We turn in our agenda every week." Their work is also publicly shared. In the second floor hallway just across from the main office, a colorful bulletin board titled "Teacher Teams 2012-13" displays copies of each team's weekly agenda posted under a photo of all the teachers on that grade. Sometimes the short articles they read together are posted on the bulletin board, too.

The principal sees the collaborative focus on student learning having impacts on the practice of individual teachers in different ways: "They're becoming researchers of their work. There's time for buy-in. Now some of the senior staff are saying, 'We can learn from newer teachers.' And we've seen a difference in the quality of their teaching." Teachers confirm the value of this kind of collaboration. One states, "It's a collaborative team. Each of us has something to share. Each is still learning. That's the atmosphere." Another teacher puts it simply, "Thank God I have supportive colleagues."

Helping Each Student Reach High Expectations

Septima Clark Elementary teachers use a workshop model, incorporating small group instruction into every lesson. Implementing a variety of formative assessment tools and strategies, they regularly document and respond to individual student growth over time, as well as use assessment data to differentiate instruction and create flexible groupings. Additionally, teachers encourage peer-to-peer interaction as a way to engage students and provide them with opportunities to model strategies, skills, and learning expectations for each other. [key theme: ❹ **enabling instructional adjustments**]

The routine focused work of grade-level teams at Septima Clark Elementary School serves as an effective starting point for teachers to build consistent expectations for all students throughout the grade while also developing means to reach different individuals. Ms. Woods, a K/1 self-contained teacher, reflects, "When looking at student work, we can compare with other classes' student work, and, looking at different students' progress, see where we should be." While each grade has designated "experts" who provide the structure and content for the lessons in each subject, and everyone tries to stay on the same page and proceed at the same pace with their weekly lesson plans, teachers regularly remark on the necessity of differentiating for what their students need in their own classrooms. A teacher explains, "We have flexibility to tweak the unit plan based on the needs of our own students. The goal is there. We have the same goal; we might not take the same approach."

The approach teachers do take is informed by routine assessments that provide insight into the changing needs of individual students. Across the school, teachers consistently maintain notes based on Running Records, guided reading groups, one-on-one conferencing, word assessments, and the Fountas and Pinnell phonemic awareness assessment. This ongoing documentation is exemplified by one sample entry in a first-grade teacher's notebook:

<div align="center">

Introduced vocab
Guided Reading Group

</div>

Elijah – need to stop at the period—to make meaning. some difficulty with contraction. need to work on different sounds the ed makes

Sophia – needed to read word endings and read the punctuation. read left—felt, need→what she is saying has to match what she is reading

Austin – need to read the punctuation. have some difficulty with sight words now—read her as here, on as no.

recommended that they chunk – when they have difficulty figuring out a word.

next steps – need to use word patterns, work on contraction

Times outside regular school hours are also set up for teachers to work in smaller classes or with small groups of their students who demonstrate additional needs. To provide targeted support twice a week during extended day sessions, teachers conduct initial assessments in September and October and then group students according to skill level. Ms. Cowart shares that she spends as much time as she can helping her students, "I work on Saturdays with lower-level readers. I help them during lunch or prep." Some children also attend the Vacation Academy that the teachers run for three days during spring vacation.

The main priority, however, is for teachers to reach their individual students during class time, and school leadership has emphasized small-group instruction through the workshop model as an expectation for every lesson. Ms. Johnson explains, "When teachers are taking notes and pulling students, that's where learning takes place. It's a non-negotiable. With the workshop model, there's together time and small-group work." The use of the model is evident when observing classes, and teachers speak of embracing the structure. "I've learned how important it is to modify for different learning styles. In the beginning, I taught whole group. Now it's whole, small group, individual, whole."

Teachers use the results they see on formative assessments such as conferring notes and exit slips to plan and adjust small-group instruction. They then arrange a variety of flexible groupings. Sometimes a group comes together just to learn a specific strategy; other times students will stay together for a few weeks in a guided-reading group at their instructional level. One teacher lays out her approach: "They don't stay within the same group. I'm constantly switching them around. I'm constantly testing them, as well, to see, 'Where are you?' I'm making a lot of observations; I'm jotting down notes just to make sure I'm ahead of the game because I want them to do very well."

In addition to the small-group instruction of the workshop model, teachers structure and schedule guided reading groups and one-on-one conferencing to further home in on individual needs. "Four days a week, I work with small groups. On the fifth day, I meet with about four to five kids individually and keep conferring notes," describes one teacher. Another teacher explains how her students with disabilities need more attention and proximity to her, even within the small group, "Our ICT [Integrated Co-Teaching] children need that extra one-on-one. Most of them can't read very well and they just have a hard time focusing. One student I tell, 'You have to be right next to me.' because he spaces out."

Teachers throughout the school use heterogeneous pairings and groupings to help students learn from each other and to give students who are advancing the learning experience of explaining the skill to someone else. An upper-grade teacher describes how she asks for her students' input, as well, "In small group instruction, I asked my students to tell me, 'What are areas you feel like you're weak in? What do you need help with?' Then I grouped kids who had mastered a skill in reading or writing or math with those who needed help."

Another part of the workshop model emphasized at the school involves having children share the work they have completed independently or in small groups, much as is called for in component 3b of the Danielson *Framework*. A fifth-grade teacher uses the experience of giving and receiving peer feedback for her students to hear examples of the quality of work that is expected of them and that they are capable of producing:

> Since the tests ended, the fifth graders have been using their study of slavery to write historical fiction. Some are revising their drafts, but most are still adding to their stories. Ms. Finley asks them to put their pencils down and says, "Bree will read her writing, and you'll give her suggestions on strengths and weaknesses. What are we looking for in this historical fiction?"

> Students' understanding of the genre and task is reflected in their responses.

> "Accurate events."

> "Fictional characters."

> "Time period."

> "Action."

> As Bree reads, Ms. Finley interjects, "Guys, I hope you're making notes."

> Virtually every student is listening intently. Several are already taking notes. A few others pick up their pencils.

> Eventually Bree stops reading and says, "That's all I wrote so far."

Ms. Finley says one word, "Strengths?" and multiple hands are up.

"There was suspense—I didn't know she'd get captured," comments one student.

"She used details. But not too much," says another.

One student cites an example, "She used figurative language—'packed like a sardine can'."

Ms. Finley then asks them, "What would improve it by making it stronger?"

One student answers, "She could improve it by adding a little more dialogue to help explain what's happening."

Another student responds directly to him, "She does!"

Virtually every student in the classroom shows signs of listening to the discussion, even as some return to writing their stories.

Reflecting on this lesson, Ms. Finley says, "When they listen to another peer, they can compare the standards, a low standard to a high standard of work, and then they can aim to reach the high standard. That has helped significantly." Another teacher sets up peer sharing between pairs of students on the cusp of mastering a skill to have them motivate each other. She describes the conversation with students, "I can put you together and you can take it to that next level. That's what I call it, 'Take it to the next level.' So they're like, 'OK, I want to go to that next level now!' They think it is the most awesome thing in the world."