



Case Study of PS 91 Richard Arkwright School, Queens: A School that Celebrates Risk-taking and the Written Word

Principal Gregory Filippi leads with a strong vision. “Our vision includes a completely literate environment where children are performing at grade level and are able to perform outside in the world, and it includes meeting all students at their individualized access points.”

Seventy percent of children at PS 91 receive free and reduced lunch in school. More than half the children are Hispanic. A few years ago, this was classified as a School in Need of Improvement. Since becoming a TCRWP school, scores have increased by approximately 22%. This is now a School in Good Standing with Distinction. Principal Filippi believes that the school’s commitment to helping students feel ownership over their own learning makes a gigantic difference at the school, as does the school’s commitment to making sure that each child feels safe within the walls of the school. Principal Filippi also notes that the school emphasizes the importance of supporting students’ interests and their particular learning styles. These beliefs have helped create a culture of talk and sharing in the school. Teachers use mood meters to check in with students each morning and use this data to pair students together. Filippi says, “This helps kids feel comfortable to talk to each other and to their teachers.” He added, “It’s important to not lose the part of learning where discourse happens.”



The work of moving literacy forward has been an exciting process. Momentum has been built with kids engaged in pair-shares, book talks, and discussions of how a character’s feelings and perspectives are changing. Excitement has also coalesced around the work of building better and better classroom libraries. “Just a year after TCRWP began working with the school, the Project gave each 3-5 classroom a carefully curated classroom library worth over \$5,000. The College also helped teachers to unpack, organize, and begin to know those libraries. Since then, the school has carefully developed those libraries.” Filippi says, “Once teachers got excited about changing their classroom libraries, they began to organize books around levels and genres—also keeping in mind their students’ interests. Teachers made sure that all students had books in their book baggies that they wanted to read.” Now, as you walk through the halls of PS 91, you see kids everywhere are always holding books in their hands, sharing books, talking about books. “Our kids love the written word,” said Principal Filippi.

At PS 91, a collaborative inquiry team helps teachers understand the areas of support that each child needs. This process is described in the school’s CEP goals as one which “fosters an environment where our diverse population of students, as well as the students with special needs, and limited English proficient students will be educated equitably and met at individualized points of access.” The school is rightfully proud that they use various methodologies to encourage student-led inquiry amongst one another, knowing that this supports critical thinking and decision making skills. All of this leads to a spirit of collaborative learning that makes PS 91 into a vibrant community of practice.

That community extends to families. Filippi notes, “Covid changed us, but it also provided more opportunities for more families.” Families are now able to Zoom into classroom celebrations and this has helped the school to continue to find ways to meet their goals around equity and increasing student voice. PS 91 is a community school where everyone celebrates their learning.

Results

28% of PS 91’s students were scoring 3s and 4s on state ELA tests in 2014. At the time of writing, 50% of students were scoring 3s and 4s.



