

U.S. Department of Education
2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [] Title I [] Charter [] Magnet [] Choice

Name of Principal Ms. Dana Rappaport
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name PS 234 Independence School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 292 Greenwich Street New York
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City New York State NY Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 10007-1048

County NEW YORK

Telephone (212) 233-6034 Fax (212) 374-1719

Web site/URL https://www.ps234.org/ E-mail drappaportchaqor@schools.nyc.gov

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Mr Kelly McGuire E-mail kmcguire@schools.nyc.gov
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name New York City Geographic District # 2 Tel. (212) 356-3739

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson NA NA Na
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The electronic signature on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 37 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 11 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 49 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
 Suburban
 Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	46	33	79
1	43	41	84
2	35	36	71
3	40	40	80
4	28	38	66
5	33	37	70
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	225	225	450

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 10 % Asian
 - 2.9 % Black or African American
 - 9.3 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1.1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 67.8 % White
 - 8.9 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 4%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	10
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	13
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	23
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	638
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.04
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Chinese, Danish, Farsi/Persian, Dutch, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Turkish, Ukrainian

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %
6 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 11 %

Total number students who qualify: 50

8. Students receiving special education services: 18 %

81 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>8</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>11</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>30</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>27</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>2</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 3

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	40
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	7
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	8
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 22:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	95%	96%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

Educate the whole child; develop students' thinking skills through rigorous, active experiences; build inclusive communities; embrace unique identities; and, promote risk-taking and a passion for learning.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

Our school is operating with a hybrid model. We follow the NYCDOE Chancellor's model 1A. We have three different cohorts. Two of our cohorts are blended and alternate between coming into school 2-3 times per week. Cohort A attends school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Cohort B attends school on Wednesdays and Fridays. They alternate attending every other Monday. Families have a year-long "cohort calendar" to keep track of which days children attend school. When students are home, they have access to both synchronous instruction via Zoom and asynchronous instruction through Google Classroom.

Beginning in February, we have been able to offer full-time in-person school to our students who are most in need. These students were identified by looking at a variety of data points including attendance records, formative and summative assessments, report cards and teacher recommendations.

Our third cohort is fully remote. We have one fully remote cohort per grade. These students have one dedicated teacher teaching synchronous lessons throughout the day. Assignments are also completed asynchronously.

Our school also provides theater enrichment, dance and library arts classes during at home blended days and for fully remote students.

17. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

PART III - SUMMARY

PS 234 is a local public school serving the downtown Tribeca neighborhood in New York, New York, serving a diverse community of learners. Although approximately one percent of our students are classified as English Language Learners, many of our students are bi- or even tri-lingual, thus adding to the richness of our overall community. Since eighteen percent of our students have IEPs, we have at least one integrated collaborative team teaching class on each grade. In Kindergarten and first grade, we added a specialized Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) program called IREAD, one of only five such programs in NYC public schools, to address dyslexia in young children. Almost every PS 234 student will have the benefit of experiencing an integrated classroom during their six years at our school---giving them an opportunity to work with two teachers who can further differentiate their work at either end of the learning spectrum and also expose students to collaboration and issues of diversity and equity on yet another level. Our students are hardworking and enjoy the challenge of a rigorous, thought-provoking curriculum.

Established in 1988, we are a school dedicated to the academic and social/emotional growth of the whole child. Our unique interdisciplinary curriculum challenges students to develop their understanding of academic concepts and the world around them through inquiry-based research and collaborative exploration. Throughout their experience at PS 234, students are encouraged to build understanding through questioning, theory formation and revision. This begins with our social emotional work wherein students begin the year by setting and defining classroom expectations. Representatives from each class then come together for a school-wide rules “convention” where students from grades Kindergarten through 5 grow a shared understanding of how our community takes care of ourselves, each other and our materials. These expectations are then re-shared with individual classes by the representatives. Children learn by building together, rather than making sense of top-down edicts set by adults. By taking part in the policy-making of our school, students hold themselves accountable for one another and understand the role that structure and rules play in the safety of our community.

This constructivist approach to learning solidifies conceptual understanding across the curriculum as students engage with big ideas. For example, in mathematics, students make sense of complex problems and persist in solving them, thereby strengthening their mathematical reasoning skills. Students work in groups, model mathematical thinking and look for connections for how problems are related to one another. Through our social studies program, students use primary sources to examine topics of study from observing fish to learn about animal behavior, to pouring through maps, political cartoons and other pictures and documents to develop an understanding of Colonial American life. Students build their understanding by examining a variety of sources, taking notes and synthesizing ideas. Embedded in this work is assuring that many perspectives are represented, so that students can understand a fuller history than traditional texts have originally told. Located in downtown Manhattan, we are able to use our community as a resource, taking advantage of our urban environment to provide experiential learning opportunities for our students--- actually walking the pathways of the Leni-Lenape and Colonial Dutch, visiting Urban Farms to understand the necessary adaptations that urban growers need to make and exploring the majesty and history of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Our work on representation and identity within the curriculum represents our core values. Over the past three years, we have diversified our libraries so that students can see themselves in the stories they read and are exposed to a range of experiences of people representing different cultures, races, ethnicities, neuro-diverse profiles and gender identities. We take to heart Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s warning of “The Danger of a Single Story,” and above all, teach the strength of diverse experiences as inclusive and respectful. These practices are in our literature and in our daily lives as a community. We have gender-neutral bathrooms, ask children for preferred pronouns and have frequent and bold conversations about race, class and privilege. Part of our role as a community school is to support the education of our community as well as the children. We do this through parent-facing workshops and newsletters. For example, during the 2019-20 school year, we worked with Raising Race Conscious Children, an organization supporting adults, “trying to talk about race with young children...to dismantle the “color-blind” framework and prepare young people to work toward racial justice.” The staff developers ran workshops for both teachers and families so that language and training would be the same for all adults.

Our families are supportive learning partners. We have excellent participation in family events, parent-teacher conferences and curriculum evenings. The principal has, in addition, sponsored grade-by-grade curriculum overviews to enhance parent understanding of the next generation learning standards and a special education meeting to address questions about our programs.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

PS 234 meets every child where they are academically, socially, and emotionally. We use a workshop model where after the main lesson, students work independently while teachers work with students individually and in targeted small groups. Teachers keep detailed assessment notes on individualized learning goals which are shared with the student during instruction.

Instruction has been adapted for online learning. Every class has its own Google Classroom to upload assignments and give feedback. Students learning at home check their Google Classroom to find the schedule and assignments for the day and work with teachers via Zoom during core instruction. PS 234 has a full-remote and blended-remote curriculum. We have made Google Classroom more user-friendly from last spring to this school year by creating similar formatting across classrooms, attaching links to grade-wide resources, creating videos to show families how to navigate different platforms, etc.

Literacy

Our literacy curricula are centered on the Units of Study from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. The program helps develop agency through the development of skills and comprehension while allowing educators to address individual student needs, explicitly teach strategies and build student choice and engagement. Kindergarten through third grade uses the Foundations program to teach word study, a multisensory and structured language program that teaches students foundational concepts and skills. Early childhood lessons are supplemented with phonemic awareness programs, which provide additional skill practice with articulation, listening, and vocabulary.

Throughout the year, we have incorporated ways to read and write using digital platforms. Teachers have created digital book collections for individual students to do nonfiction research, work in book clubs and read leveled books. Early childhood teachers create shared reading documents on Google Slides that can be annotated to highlight new sight words and vocabulary. Fourth grade remote learners complete writing via Google docs and share digital writer's notebooks with their teachers. First grade remote teachers hold writing celebrations by screen sharing student work on Slides. And students in 2nd and 4th grade practice reading fluency by sharing videos of themselves reading via Flipgrid.

Formal literacy assessments are completed four times a year, September/October, December, March, and May/June. Acadience reading assessments are also completed by our reading specialist to gauge phonic and phonemic awareness skills. These assessments give guidance to instruction, intervention and home support. We have been able to do these assessments live and over Zoom.

Math

Our math curriculum utilizes the TERC Investigations Center for Curriculum and Professional Development. Investigations Math includes eight units per grade, implementation and content guides, developed by educators (one of whom is a former 234 staff member) and is aligned with CCSS. Each grade unit establishes the process and structures, materials, routines, and community that will introduce and reinforce the mathematical concepts for the year. There is embedded differentiation support, professional development and digital support in every unit. At the end of each unit, there are student assessments which give guidance for differentiation support, at school and at home. This work is also supplemented with curricular materials which support teachers in developing their competence rigorous evidence-based instructional models.

Remote learners use breakout rooms to play interactive games and work on math projects together. Our math program has a digital curriculum which includes access to an online workbook, differentiated games and assessment tools. Teachers use Google slides and Jamboards to interact with students in live sessions. Students upload math work through Google Classroom. Assessments are done both live and remotely.

Social Studies

Through project-based learning, 234 staff develop and implement studies for each grade level. Beginning in the youngest grades with concrete topics, like fish and farm-to-table/recycling, to community bridges and transportation hubs, to historical events in the history of New York City/The Americas and its indigenous people, and historical implications of social justice on world events. Built into the curriculum are self-assessment opportunities, peer-assessments, and teacher assessments.

During remote learning, students share on online bulletin boards called “padlets.” Teachers do virtual field trips with organizations, i.e. the New York Historical Society and give students access to primary documents. Blended and distance learners are able to use these primary sources to form theories about topics of study.

Science

Students take on the role of scientists as they solve unit problems using the Amplify curriculum. Students follow an inquiry approach when they ask questions and use resources such as hands-on experiments, computer simulations, and fiction and non-fiction literature to develop content understanding. Lessons are extended to connect science concepts to students' own lives in New York City. They work on teams and as a class to create hypotheses, test ideas, and incorporate new information into their previous understandings. While learning remotely, students work as a team through breakout rooms, shared documents, and Jamboards. Units are aligned with the NYC Scope and Sequence standards and the Next Generation Science Standards. Our science curriculum includes charts and recording sheets completed by students that teachers use to assess student understanding at the end of each lesson. There are also mid and end-of-unit assessments to review learning across a longer period. In addition, teachers create digital assessments such as online folders, notebooks and Flipgrids to review student learning.

1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):

1b. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

P.S. 234 balances the development of the whole child by offering various programs in the Arts, PE, Library and Social Emotional Learning.

The ARTS

P.S. 234 has a long and rich history of valuing the arts in children's learning.

Prior to COVID, we offered chorus classes in Kindergarten through third grade through The Center for Arts Education and instrumental music beginning in the fourth grade. This year, K-4 students began Acting and Improvisation with Wingspan Arts. Through theatrical improvisation, students listen and respond in character within imaginary circumstances, and practice their reading comprehension skills by acting out scripts. Our fifth grade continues its longstanding residency with the National Dance Institute, pivoting its weekly classes to a remote platform. Every student at PS234 has hands-on visual arts experiences once a week. Lessons include nurturing students' self-expression, self-worth and independent thinking.

PE

Physical Education at PS 234 is based on the NYC K-5 Physical Education Scope and Sequence. Students have PE two times per week. Our program teaches students fundamental skills and focuses on giving them

confidence. We emphasize community building, sportsmanship and socio-emotional learning. Students practice and implement skills through activities and games. This year, we have modified activities to be COVID safe (i.e. “noodle tag” to keep a safe distance) or to foster individual skill building. Field day--- a treasured school-wide event—was done completely virtually last year, but we are planning for a full hybrid-remote day of fun this year.

Library

Whether school is in session virtually or in person, the library program promotes the love of reading, inspires curiosity, and cultivates the skills necessary for critical thinking and lifelong learning. Pre-pandemic, students of all grade levels came to the library every other week for read alouds and lessons in information literacy and library skills. In addition, they were allowed to browse our collection of more than 15,000 books that reflect our curriculum and the diversity of the world in which we live. As we moved to a hybrid model, the library has continued to offer read alouds over Zoom for fully remote students and for hybrid students working at home. In addition, we offer online circulation, with classroom delivery for students in school and curbside pick-up for students who are fully remote.

SEL

At PS 234, we prioritize educating the whole child. Responsive Classroom is a student-centered, social and emotional learning approach to teaching and discipline that is utilized in each classroom at PS 234. The set of research, and evidence-based practices is designed to create safe, joyful, and engaging classrooms and school communities for both students and teachers.

This year, members of our staff have formed a SEL (Social-Emotional Learning) committee to create resources for working with children and supporting our families and staff during these uncertain times. Our work as a committee focuses on giving our children the necessary life skills they need to navigate their world inside and outside of the classroom. Our goal is to develop skills that help to prioritize communication, empathy and problem solving.

3. Academic Supports:

Students Performing Below and Above Grade Level

PS 234 educators use students’ strengths, preferences, and interests when planning both in-person and remote lessons. Our curriculum encourages rigor to challenge students’ thinking through differentiated and small-group instruction. Teachers provide varying levels of support within a classroom, including opportunities for students to work together. Students performing above grade level are provided extensions across content areas to deepen their critical thinking skills. We offer academic choices for students to demonstrate their understanding in a variety of ways. Teachers use formative and summative assessments to make these decisions for strong students.

Teachers and service providers use assessments to identify students at academic risk and provide push-in and pull-out intervention. For example, early childhood students are given a phonemic awareness assessment. Those who score below level are provided with a cycle of intervention within the classroom. If they do not make progress, a tier two intervention cycle is initiated. Progress monitoring is done at six week intervals. And new decisions are made. Additionally, our Pupil Personnel Team (PPT) meets monthly to discuss student progress and provide teachers the support they need as they move through the Response to Intervention (RTI) tiers of intervention.. This ensures PS 234 provides appropriate goals, services, interventions, accommodations and placement for the student.

Special Education/Students With Disabilities

For special education students, instructional strategies, including specially designed instruction, provide the targeted intervention necessary to support student areas of need and build on student strengths. Teachers collect data, such as classroom assessments, progress monitoring and teacher/provider observations to inform their instructional planning. Teachers then modify and adapt the content, methodology and delivery of instruction for individual learners. PS 234's goal is to ensure access for students to the general education curriculum.

PS 234 educators have collaborated to develop a shared resource of consistent reading intervention materials and programs. We use supplemental literacy intervention programs such as Leveled Literacy Intervention System (LLI) to support students with reading and writing. Teachers have developed both remote and in-person assessments and materials.

ELLs

Though the ELL population at PS 234 is small (1.4%), we have a strong program aimed at helping ELL students build English proficiency in tandem with strengthening their knowledge of class content and skills. Our ELL groups are based on both language proficiency level and grade so we can tailor instruction to individual needs and proficiency goals based on previous New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners and New York State English Language Achievement Test exams. Built around the four skills that ELLs must acquire (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), our ELL program is content-based utilizing a balanced literacy approach in the workshop model. We use scaffolds such as wordless books, word banks, sentence frames, and Total Physical Response when appropriate. With both the small group instruction delivered to ELLs by our ELL teacher and the collaboration between the ELL and classroom teachers, we support our ELLs progress towards a commanding level of proficiency, as seen through consistent trends of growth on NYSESLAT scores by all of our ELL students.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Students at PS 234 are motivated to be agents of their own learning. Teachers facilitate this by asking open-ended questions so that children grow their own ideas and feel confident in their ability to do so. Students guide the conversation and call on one another in a conversational manner (as opposed to teacher calls student and student responds).

We use artifacts, primary documents and music to spark interest and engage learners who join these discussions with a variety of background information. The culture of our school is that students are encouraged to muck around with ideas that are just starting to form. This means that students feel emotionally supported throughout the learning process, and not just when they have a “right” answer. Students are given academic choice including writing, presentations, and artistic projects to demonstrate their awareness or appreciation of concepts they are learning.

With our hybrid learning model, we have been able to offer videos and readings for learners to engage with at home, with the expectation that students will return to school with questions that are lingering for them. These questions inform teachers about where to steer the discovery process. Although we have a scope and sequence mapped out, we still involve students in making learning decisions. For example, as part of a study of urban farms, a first grade class began with a field trip to a neighborhood farm to explore the organizations and structures specific to urban farms. After returning from the trip, the students further processed their firsthand experiences and solidified their understandings through mapping with block building.

Whether learning at home or at school, students have opportunities to work independently, in partnership and in small groups. Teachers use homogeneous and heterogeneous combinations to support both the academic and social needs of students. This is best illustrated by our upper grade book clubs where students have been placed in clubs to target specific reading goals in the beginning of the year, but then are grouped by their interest in particular genres later in the year.

We use project-based learning across the curriculum so that students can take ownership over the parts of their learning that are most important to them and are well-versed in becoming experts on a topic so that they can teach a fellow student. Digital platforms enable partners and groups to grow, share and present ideas when learning at home.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

PS 234 is a zoned community school and the close-knit fiber of the neighborhood transfers over into our school building. We believe that the more involved parents and guardians are in our school community the more successful their children will be in school. Families align with this belief and they are encouraged to be active participants in their children’s learning, in their classrooms and as members of the PTA. The PTA is the core of family involvement at PS 234. We have an active membership and community events throughout the year giving families opportunities to socialize and create strong bonds. We have always engaged parents by asking them to volunteer in the classrooms, in the library and at all community events. In this particular year with COVID social distancing rules in place, the PTA pivoted its outreach to holding all events virtually, including its monthly meetings. They also create monthly events to keep the community together, i.e. mindfulness for parents and virtual cookie decorating for families.

We have found that the most successful strategy for enhancing student success and addressing items that might need improvement is to be an active listener. We encourage conversations between parents and teachers through weekly communications and daily teacher office hours. The principal holds grade-wide roundtable meetings addressing academic and social development, sends regular family newsletters, surveys and speaks at the monthly PTA meetings to offer a forum for parents and guardians to ask questions and raise concerns.

Over the years we have partnered with various non-profit organizations such as the Ackerman Institute and Raising Race Conscious Children to address issues that we feel are important to discuss with both children and adults. Topics that they addressed recently were gender diversity and race relations. We also reach out to our own parent community in order to tap into their pool of resources. Parents have led workshops on mindfulness, sexuality and technology. During COVID, we created a re-opening committee that consisted of parents who had expertise in the medical professions, architecture and technology. These community partners advised us on best practices for protocols and strategies to help students, staff and families return to school this fall.

The PTA also helps raise funds to help support teachers with their continued professional development for teachers. Our school has also successfully harnessed capital funding from the Manhattan Borough President's office for projects such as refillable water stations and computers.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

The more teachers have the opportunity to learn, collaborate, reflect, assess and engage as a community of learners themselves, the more they will be able to offer to their students. Our professional development calendar includes cycles of learning for curricular areas of focus, cross grade calibration of student assessment, learning communities on school-wide initiatives, inquiry-based learning, child-study groups, and cycles where teachers self-select a topic of study. Grade teams meet with administrators to focus on topics based on the pacing calendar. In 2019, our teams revamped our schedule to include an extra period once per month to extend grade meetings---the first part observing practice inside of a classroom, then reviewing student work afterward.

At the beginning of the shutdown, our teams quickly banded together to work as cohesive planning teams, each member taking on different parts of the curriculum and sharing work products across Google classrooms. Padlets and Google slides were made to share across grade teams. Each teacher was a "co-teacher" in the other's virtual class. Administration had regular virtual meetings throughout the spring to check in with grade teams, cluster teachers, paraprofessionals and the whole staff. In planning for the fall, we worked with a newly formed SEL team to plan coming back to school for staff, families and children. This team has been also pivotal in our equity work as the year has progressed.

We partner with outside consultants to provide learning opportunities for our teachers. The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University works with teachers throughout the year. Pre-COVID, we worked through a learning lab model for each grade level to meet with the staff developer, watch a demonstration lesson and try out techniques in a learning lab classroom. This year, we have continued the model through virtual coaching. Consultants have created distance learning materials such as virtual library collections, teaching videos and Padlets of resources. Our consultant from Metamorphosis math has focused on developing teacher content knowledge and working on expanding student engagement, including teaching how to think about mathematical relationships and planning questions that encourage mathematical reasoning. We have been able to shift our learning labs from the classroom to an after-school model wherein we analyze video-taped lessons that teachers make with their students to grow professional craft. We have also worked with outside partners on specific areas of focus, i.e. racial and gender diversity/equity and inclusive practices.

4. School Leadership:

PS 234 is a school that believes in distributive leadership and including stakeholders in core decisions. The principal has created structures to inform and incorporate the ideas of staff, families and students in the policies and initiatives of the school. Each grade team has one leader who works with the principal and assistant principal to plan the whole school professional development calendar for the year and serve as liaisons to administrators providing them with updates on grade-wide pacing, materials needed and other student learning analyses. They recently worked with administrators, an outside consultant, and their grade teams to order more culturally diverse and representative classroom libraries.

Our school leadership team, composed of parents, school administrators, our parent coordinator and teachers, works on school-wide initiatives. We develop academic goals for the school based on formative and summative assessment data. We have been working on lifting the bottom third of our students in math and reading, for example. We also have been aligned in diversifying our community through our participation in a citywide pilot to set aside kindergarten admission seats for students in temporary housing and those who qualify for free and reduced lunch. This year, we have been working with our team to revise our mission statement to include our commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity.

During COVID, we involved all our stakeholders in planning, convening a large reopening team of parents and staff members. Our health and safety committee had doctors, teachers and an administrator. They reviewed the policies from the Department of Education, created a guide for families, found child-friendly videos on handwashing and mask wearing, arranged for a Q & A session for teachers with the doctors, etc. Another committee thought about furniture arrangement, personalized bins for children's supplies, how to manage social distancing in hallways and in the classrooms. Another committee, our SEL leaders, focused on supporting staff, families and children in coming back to school. The SEL leaders opened a Google classroom with yoga and other activities for staff members. They organized socially distanced get togethers to connect. The principal organized these committees and she and the assistant principal planned each of the agendas and follow ups with the committee members.

The principal has regular updates both in person and via newsletters with the community and its stakeholders. Transparency is key to helping staff and family feel safe and supported during this crisis.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

At P.S. 234, we value creating an inclusive curriculum, a welcoming environment, and a supportive learning experience for all members of our community. We assess and revise our curriculum to address the diverse needs of our community. We have spent the past few years evaluating our libraries and have worked to provide books that reflect our students' identities and of others that may be less familiar. Once a month, all classrooms read the same book and as a school we engage in conversations and projects that reflect themes of diversity and justice. Our social studies curriculum includes interdisciplinary studies that allow students time to dive deeply into a topic, and these studies have changed over the years as we thought about how to be more inclusive and culturally aware. For example, in third grade, students study the local indigenous tribes of New York City, and we spent time revising what is taught and the perspective of the stories that are told.

All teachers and students participate in daily morning meetings and closing circles which are times to engage in meaningful ways, from being acknowledged for one's individuality to sharing about a common experience. We also use this time to address bigger issues that impact our community. Located in Lower Manhattan, P.S. 234 was greatly impacted by the events of 9-11, and each year teachers honor the anniversary by talking about our role in this historical event. These daily meetings are also times when we discuss current events and social issues. After schools shut down in March of 2020, and our country found itself grappling with big ideas around race, our teachers made space for students to process these events and express their thoughts and feelings. While never taking a political stance, we helped students make sense of the issues, answered their questions and made sure that classrooms were safe spaces to lead conversations. We always communicate with families to support them in continuing these talks and they often thank us for opening up the dialogue on such sensitive subjects and creating a framework for them to continue these discussions at home.

At P.S. 234 we believe that for true learning to occur, we need to work and grow together as a community. We spend time engaging in many of these same conversations and recognize the

importance of different voices and the discomfort that can come with pushing your own boundaries.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

At P.S. 234, we promote critical thinking throughout our learning day, and the heart of our school beats most strongly through our social studies program. Our teachers design and implement semester-long inquiry-based units. The content of these studies has changed while overall goals and learning objectives have remained the same, with focus sheets listing big ideas and timelines for implementation. Recently, in the first grade Urban Farm study, the idea of the food desert, and people having access to locally sourced produce regardless of income has become more prominent. In third grade, the study of Lenape tribes of New York City has been revised to include more indigenous perspectives. By the time our students are in fifth grade, they have spent many years learning how to do research, and how inquiry can lead to fruitful learning. They study social action groups in our country's history, giving them a chance to explore how people from the past have brought about change. We hope this sends them off to their futures knowing that they, too, can effect change.

Our studies are framed around the needs of a community and how they meet these needs. We incorporate experiential learning, reading, writing, art, and interviews as ways of both accessing content and demonstrating understanding. Students study primary sources as a way of investigating the world around them, posing questions, forming hypotheses, revising them, and developing theories about the world around them. As a community, we recognize the importance of investigating something deeply, and the power that comes from finding answers to questions. Our students learn by hearing multiple voices, learning from a variety of resources, and sharing their own understanding.

During the shutdown, we no longer had access to physical artifacts and field trips. Our staff quickly accessed a world of primary and secondary resources online to continue this powerful learning and set out to find creative ways to make the content accessible to all the learners. When the third graders were not able to interview a member of the Lenape tribe at Ward Pound Ridge, we found a library of resources through Gothamcenter.org to supplement the readings. Our first grade teachers continued the Urban Farm study by setting up virtual tours and interviews.

Each year, students hone their reading, writing, analytical skills. They learn to work in groups and present their work. They revise their presentations to develop themselves as independent learners.