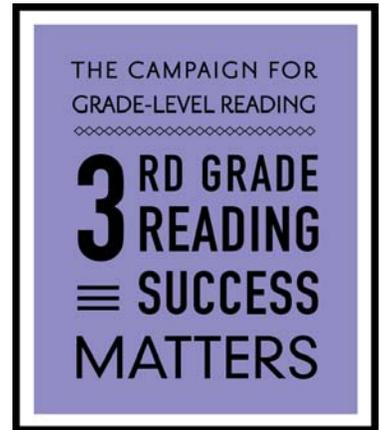


BRIGHT SPOTS

High Opportunity Schools



P.S. 83 Luis Munoz Rivera, New York, NY

In two decades with P.S. 83 Luis Munoz Rivera, Frances Castillo has witnessed a remarkable transformation in this East Harlem school. “It used to be that teachers and students alike would dread coming to school,” says Castillo, who has been principal since 2003. Castillo attributes the school’s rebirth to increased collaboration among students, teachers, and administrators. “Today, our students take ownership of their own learning,” she says, “and every teacher has a voice in the direction of our school.”

Such teamwork is evident in the strong partnership between Castillo and the assistant principal, Hazel Cruz. Castillo prefers the term *co-principal* to describe Cruz.

Balanced literacy approach

The curriculum is a mix of several programs fitted together to raise the literacy levels of the school’s diverse and constantly changing population. Formerly a strictly basal school using traditional textbooks to teach reading in a tightly sequential manner, P.S. 83 Luis Munoz Rivera now uses a [balanced literacy approach](#) that incorporates multiple reading strategies and the use of fiction and non-fiction trade books instead of textbooks.

Third graders might read several books about frogs, for example, in a reading lesson mixed with science that differentiates between fiction and non-fiction. Students become frog experts, writing reports and developing presentations on the subject. “We’re very interdisciplinary,” says Castillo.

WHO THEY ARE

408 students, Pre-K–5th

34% African American, 55% Hispanic

93% FARM

10% ELL

WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

2009 New York English Language Arts:

3rd grade 96%

4th grade 96%

CONTACT

P.S. 83 Luis Munoz Rivera

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Frances Castillo, Principal

Hazel Cruz, Assistant Principal

A–Z leveled reading

The school assesses student reading ability according to the [Fountas & Pinnell](#) leveled reading approach, matching each student with books appropriate to his or her skill level, identified A through Z. Third graders should be reading at levels N through O, explains Castillo, but a third grade class might include L through P readers. Strategies range from a “pull-out” program, in which individual students meet with a reading specialist at least three times each week, and a “push-in” program for guided reading, in which teachers work with small groups of students — below and above grade level — within the classroom.

Children at risk of academic failure get one-on-one tutoring in an intensive 15-week [Reading Recovery](#) intervention, based on the work of reading instruction pioneer Marie Clay.

Several other programs support and encourage reading at P.S. 83 Luis Munoz Rivera:

- [Accelerated Reader](#), with computer-based self-assessments and school-wide competition.
- [100 Book Challenge](#) including reading at home and parent engagement
- Principal Castillo’s Book of the Month.

February’s Book of the Month, *Amos and Boris*, by William Steig, demonstrates caring, one of the [Six Pillars](#) of character — trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship — emphasized at P.S. 83 Luis Munoz Rivera. “We do lots of assessments,” says Castillo, “but we never forget that we’re teaching the whole child.” Children who have done something wrong know that they can wipe the slate clean by acknowledging their mistake and making amends. “This neighborhood isn’t the easiest place to grow up, but children feel safe and loved in our school. Every tomorrow is a bright new day.”

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- **Balanced literacy approach using fiction and non-fiction trade books**
- **Fountas & Pinnell leveled reading assessments**
- **Computer-based Accelerated Reader and 100 Book Challenge encourage independent reading**
- **Intensive Reading Recovery intervention for at-risk students**