

The School for Human Rights

**The School for Human Rights
600 Kingston Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Kevin Dotson

Dates of review: May 30 – June 1, 2006

**Reviewer: Linda Murgatroyd
Cambridge Education**

The School for Human Rights

Content Of The Report

Part 1: The School Context

Background information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

What is the school's overall performance

How well does it meet New York City's evaluation criteria

Other key observations

Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

The School for Human Rights

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

The School for Human Rights was opened in 2004 on the Wingate Campus, a site shared with three other schools. It is part of the Autonomy Zone of school which currently serves 296 students from grades 6, 7, 9 and 10, but will ultimately serve grades 6 through 12. The majority of students (89%) are from African American backgrounds, with approximately 8% Hispanic. The remaining students are from White or Asian backgrounds. The proportion of recently arrived immigrant students, mainly from Guyana, Trinidad and Haiti, is higher than average for both city-wide and similar schools. Five percent of the students are classified as English language learners. The school is an inclusive environment, with 19 special education students, including 8 from D75, who are fully included in classes with their peers. Approximately 60% are Title 1 Eligible, a broadly similar proportion to that found city-wide. The majority of students enter the school below grade level. Many students face challenging circumstances in their home lives.

As a new school, there is still a small staff, many of whom are relatively inexperienced teachers. All staff members carry multiple responsibilities. The school places a strong focus on assisting students with managing their behavior, developing a 'discipline with dignity' approach based on conflict resolution.

To address its designation as a school with a human rights focus, the school has a partnership with Human Rights Education Associates, which supports the school in developing this aspect of its curriculum. Students and teachers are engaged in lessons that explore the social justice and human rights aspects of the content they study, particularly in advisory sessions. The school also has a working relationship with Lincoln Center Theater, adding theater studies to the curriculum.

The School for Human Rights

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The commitment to human rights education is actively pursued in the curriculum.
- The school places a high priority on students' personal development and their awareness of the wider world.
- Most teaching is proficient, and engages students' interest.
- Decisions about the curriculum are firmly based on students' needs and interests.
- Effective partnerships enhance the curriculum and provide good support for teachers.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve the organization of management structures and allocate responsibilities more effectively to allow the principal to focus on the strategic direction of the school.
- Involve staff more fully in the development of the school.
- Further develop a consistent approach to students' behavior, both in class and in the hallways by
 - involving students in the formulation of school rules and expectations;
 - ensuring that these are clearly understood and agreed by students and their parents;
 - reminding students of these expectations regularly, both by classroom displays and verbally;
 - ensuring that staff develop a common set of responses to infractions of school rules and apply these consistently.
- Develop a more consistent approach to assessment at grade level.
- Follow this up with more systematic compilation and analysis of data on students' performance, including by ethnicity and gender, to determine patterns of progress and to guide instruction and intervention.
- Develop a school-wide approach to lesson planning, and share plans and rubrics with students so that they understand what they need to do to succeed.
- Continue to build parental involvement so that they can better support their children's learning.

The School for Human Rights

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school overall, although there are some important issues to address.

The school is only at the end of its second year, and the culture of the school is not yet well established. The principal has a clear vision of what he wishes to achieve, but has not yet been successful in unifying all staff in working towards common goals. Although most faculty work hard and all want their students to do well, there is not a common acceptance that all staff needs to work as a team to establish shared ownership of development. Because of this, the principal spends too much time sorting out relatively minor issues, rather than developing the strategic direction of the school. There are considerable inconsistencies in expectations and in practice. As a result, students' behavior and attitudes to work vary between classes.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria.

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient overall, although some aspects are under developed.

The school gathers a good range of information relating to individual students' progress and performance including continuous assessment while teaching, and students' class work as well as more formal testing. Individual data is collected at benchmark points, and used by senior staff to plot the progress of particular classes and grade levels, as well as to identify individual students needing further help. Attendance data is also analyzed to show patterns or trends, and to take action where necessary.

The school analyzes this data to examine trends in the performance and progress of students, and to design action where there are patterns of difficulty. Senior staff monitors overall performance, but at present there is little analysis by ethnic, racial and ability groups to indicate how well needs of the minority groups in the school are addressed. The staff is aware from their own observations that girls perform better than boys, but there has not been any disaggregation of data by gender to quantify this. Without this analysis, it is difficult for the school to design interventions to address underperformance of particular groups.

Some teachers share rubrics and lesson plans with students so that they are aware of what they have to do to succeed in class, but this is not established practice across the school. Most teachers are adept at assessing students' performance and their learning process on a day-to-day basis, and some are engaged in ongoing discussions with other staff and students themselves about the next steps for students' learning. However, the opportunities for discussion are limited as some teachers do not put in time to do so, so that some valuable information is not shared. School summative data shows year-to-year improvement at an adequate level, particularly for the middle school students and in

The School for Human Rights

Because the school is new and still small, there are few similar schools in the city, and comparisons of performance are not particularly useful. School leaders read the report cards of other schools and review the information in their own Department of Education records, but most comparison is informal.

Quality Statement 2: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient overall, although there are some areas for improvement.

A good range of information on students' progress is gathered by the staff. Teachers work with students to compile a learning profile early in their time in school. This is used particularly in advisory sessions as the basis of dialogue between students and staff, so that students know how they learn best and what they need to work on to improve. Grade teams set individual goals for students on a regular basis, identifying students who need additional support, and compiling learning plans for each student. Individual goals relating to the grades they are aiming for are set with each student by their teachers.

All faculty members know their students' strengths and areas for development well. The Advisory system is used to give individual feedback to students, both generally and specifically. One teacher was seen giving feedback very sensitively to students about their performance in a test, so that students who were not doing so well were not embarrassed in front of their peers. Some classrooms display expectations and criteria for graduation, but this is not consistent practice.

Goals and targets are shared with parents in a number of ways. Teachers regularly contact parents by telephone, to give feedback or raise concerns. There are meetings for groups of parents, and family meetings in March for students whose promotion is in doubt. As a result of this concern for students' progress, the proportion of students whose promotion is in doubt has fallen significantly for grade 6 to 7, and for approximately one sixth of identified students from grade 7 to 8. As part of Academic Intervention Services, there are specific morning instruction sessions to help students to meet goals. The parent coordinator and social worker work together to engage parents as partners in their children's learning, but this work is in an early stage.

The principal ensures that teachers are accountable for the progress that their classes make by discussions and reviews. There are variations in the aspirations faculty have for their students and the ways in which they set and pursue goals. All want their students to do well, but there is little shared understanding of how to achieve desired outcomes. Some grade teams compare the grading of students' work, but this is not consistent practice. Because of the lack of consistency and shared understanding, students get confusing messages about the expectations placed upon them, and may not always be clear about how to do as well as they can.

Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources

The School for Human Rights

around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient overall.

The school's curriculum has an appropriate emphasis on building students' skills in the core subjects, as they enter with levels of proficiency below those expected for their grade level. In addition, in response to the identification of students' different learning styles, the school has initiated courses in visual arts and theatre studies. These courses add opportunities for students to express themselves in a range of media, based on the school's understanding of their strengths and areas for development. The theater studies partnership with the Lincoln Center Theater is a good example. Students are taken to see plays, and then explore the themes raised back in school in role play, adding not only to their understanding of the play but also adding a dimension of personal development in acting out difficult issues. The school has also initiated additional studies in law, science and technology to meet students' interests and aspirations. Human Rights Education Associates provide guidance and support on meeting the human rights element of the curriculum through an onsite program associate. Students have studied human rights champions, and explored the underlying issues in many of the world's trouble spots.

Information from the assessment of such activities is fed into the overall picture of students' progress, and used to identify curricular areas that need further attention. For example, the principal and assistant principal are currently considering the most appropriate way to provide summer school for those students who may not graduate. Staff is involved in discussions about the development of the curriculum in their own subjects.

A number of field trips and visits to places of interest enhance the curriculum and help to maintain students' interest. Because there is still a very small staff, the options for extension and extra-curricular activities are somewhat limited, but students enjoy those that are provided. The school successfully pursues and maintains a range of partnerships with other agencies, which provide for additional needs.

Membership of the Autonomy Zone allows the school flexibility with its budget, and this has allowed the hiring of additional staff to create opportunities for team teaching. This has the effect of ensuring that students who require additional support are given it, as well as providing a valuable opportunity for teachers to learn from each other.

Students trust that staff will sort out problems for them, and parents report that they appreciate that their children are known well by staff. Attendance is rigorously pursued, and data analyzed to identify individuals and groups of students causing concern. The school has initiated a series of initiatives to address poor attendance and punctuality, including Appreciation Breakfasts for parents of students with good attendance. The most successful strategy has been special interest days such as a celebration of the Olympics and an awards ceremony; attendance was over 90% for both these events.

Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and

The School for Human Rights

capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient overall.

Staff has been recruited in a number of ways; in some cases, this has been through an interest in human rights work, others by personal recommendation, as well as through recruitment events. Turnover has been fairly high in the two years since the school opened, and this has been a contributing factor to the lack of cohesion of the staff group as a whole. All staff wants to do their best for their students, but the staff group is not united in its approach and commitment to establishing a shared culture and approach.

Teaching is proficient and promotes learning successfully. In the most successful lessons, expectations are high, there is mutual respect and students work with concentration. Teachers use questions which challenge students to think clearly, and in the best practice, to articulate their learning process. In these lessons, students progress well. In some classes, expectations are not sufficiently high and activities are less well organized, so students are unsettled and sometimes disruptive. There is not a common approach to lesson planning, or to sharing the purpose of the lesson with students so that they know what they are expected to achieve.

Most staff recognizes that students' behavior is not always as calm and cooperative as it should be. The school has worked hard on developing a shared understanding of how to promote good behavior and deal with conflict. Some staff has been trained in conflict resolution, and in techniques for Discipline with Dignity, and more such training is planned. However, expectations differ between staff members, as does the capacity to deal with infractions of school rules, and students are not dealt with consistently. For example, during one lesson a student wore an earpiece for an electronic device throughout the class, and at the start of another lesson, a student wrote on the display in a classroom, right in front of the teacher, but neither was addressed. Expectations about behavior are not made explicit to students often enough, and although some classrooms have rules displayed, others do not.

The principal observes staff both formally and informally, and gives verbal and written feedback on these observations. Supportive action is taken to address underperformance of teachers, if necessary. There are good opportunities for professional development in terms of training and courses, but there is not a consistent pattern of peer observations or of teaching staff learning from each other through collaborative work and evaluation.

Quality Statement 5: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient overall.

School development and initiatives are carefully planned, based firmly on the needs of students. Their effectiveness is reviewed regularly with amendments and changes as necessary, but staff participation in these activities varies. Staff recognizes that in this relatively new school many systems and structures which lead to establishing school culture and efficient management are not yet fully in place. The principal and assistant

The School for Human Rights

principal show commitment to these developments, as do some staff, but there is not yet a way forward translated into collective responsibility. As a result, the principal spends too much time dealing with immediate issues and crises, rather than having time to develop a more strategic approach.

The School for Human Rights

Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.	o	✓	+
<p>1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, mathematics, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are “objective” when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards-based, • consistent across students, • capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice, <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the performance of different students to be compared, and • learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified. 		X	
<p>1.2 The school makes effective use of the data to assess the performance and progress of students by racial and ethnic groups, English Language Learners and special education students, and all other categories of interest to the school.</p> <p>{This criterion and the next are partially aspirational as of now. City and State Report Cards and Division of Accountability and Assessment reports provide only some of the necessary data. The NYC DOE will soon provide schools with fuller access to better data.}</p>		X	
<p>1.3 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, racial and ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.</p>	X		
Quality Statement 2: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	o	✓	+
<p>2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable, goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.</p>	X		
<p>2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as warranting attention.</p>		X	
<p>2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.</p>		X	
<p>2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. That information is central to setting reasonably challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.</p>		X	
<p>2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.</p>	X		

The School for Human Rights

Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	0	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals.		X	
3.2 Decisions about the use of teacher and student time are based on the organization of the day and week needed to inform teachers about each student's performance and next learning steps, set goals and plans for improved student learning, and implement and continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals.		X	
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.5 Teachers are accountable for student outcomes. The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.	X		
3.6 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	

Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	0	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.	X		
4.2 Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer- evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including, when possible, by comparing outcomes across classrooms and schools. The school monitors its performance and tackles weaknesses. Even in areas where the school is successful, leadership is not complacent, but aims to improve further. The goal in all cases is to improve student and school performance and progress.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.	X		
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.		X	
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.	X		

The School for Human Rights

Quality Statement 5: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.	o	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by interim assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.		X	