



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Harlem Renaissance High School**

**High School 285**

**22 East 128 Street,  
New York  
NY 10035**

**Principal: Mary Rice Boothe**

**Dates of Review: May 17 - 18, 2007**

**Reviewer: Ronnie Young**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Harlem Renaissance High School is a transfer school located in 100-year-old purpose-built premises in Manhattan. It accepts only students aged between 15 and 17 who are repeating 9th grade and have fewer than eight credits. It is the only school in Manhattan working with this narrow age range. It accepts students transferring from any high school, although it gives priority to those from Manhattan and the Bronx.

The school currently caters for 198 students in grades 9 through 12. Of these, 7% are special education students and 2% are English language learners. Fifty-three percent of students are Black, 43% are Hispanic with fewer than 4% of other ethnic backgrounds. The gender ratio is about 60:40 females to males. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding, with 48% students eligible.

Harlem Renaissance High is a Diploma Plus school. This model gives a framework for structuring the school, running the classrooms, using assessments, supporting the students academically and finance, and allows accelerated credit earning in mathematics and English language arts. The partnership gives the school the opportunity to have a coach on site to work with staff members to support their curriculum development, and also provides training and support to staff in a variety of areas.

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## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- There are individualized programs for each student that are flexible and allow for speedy intervention when necessary.
- The strong emphasis on skills and competences complements and raises achievement in the mandatory content-driven Regents programs.
- There are high levels of collaboration among all staff.
- Clear systems and policies, which are closely monitored and understood by all, exist across the school.
- The principal, ably assisted by the assistant principal, is well respected and is rapidly effecting change.
- There is new and increasing emphasis on the social and emotional needs of the students by all staff.

### What the school needs to improve

- Explore the possibility of partnerships with community-based organizations that work with parents to improve parent participation.
- Use ways of differentiation in classes, other than by level and program, such as by using learning styles or multiple intelligences.
- Develop expertise in the identification of and strategies for working with students with specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia.
- Develop systems for individualized and appropriate long-term and interim goal setting for all students, using measurable targets that are based on data.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

In the nine months the principal has been in post, she has begun to embed the use of data, starting with this year's cohort, and staff have started to use it to plan and monitor performance. However, the school recognizes that more professional development is needed before all staff are fully competent in its use. All students and their programs are individualized at this unique school, so comparisons are not traditionally used, but the school is exploring ways to do this. There is a great emphasis on youth development, with 1:1 advisors for each student and a wide range of electives which complement the Diploma Plus curriculum, the latter being particularly appropriate for the students of this school, as credits can be achieved through skills and competences, rather than through hours spent in class. This means students generally have high levels of engagement and there are excellent relationships across the school, with high levels of collaboration.

As yet, no target setting takes place, other than vague long-term goals for students. However, the principal has introduced timelines, responsibilities, action steps and impact measurement into school plans, and there is a recognition that this must be carried out at student and group level. The school also recognizes that its present method of differentiation, by level and program, should be expanded to include multiple intelligences and learning styles.

The biggest challenges faced by the school are inconsistent attendance by students and active participation by parents. The school recognizes that these are the greatest barriers to student achievement, and is exploring ways of supporting students emotionally and socially to facilitate their success at Harlem Renaissance High and to increase parent participation.

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

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.**

#### **This area of the school's work is proficient**

Since the current principal's arrival, in September 2006, the school has instituted a vehicle for collecting, analyzing and using data from a variety of sources, including State standardized test results, anecdotes, writing assignments, student surveys, student portfolios, report cards, attendance records and transcripts.

When a student enrolls, their individualized program is worked out from their previous school records, including their transcript, attendance records and individual education plans, where appropriate. This means data is tracked on an individual basis throughout. Data is collated on a class-by-class basis. Data is also broken down into groups of English language learners and special education students. The school does not regularly break down data into ethnicity or gender, as the focus is on individualization, although it has noted that retention rates for males are lower than for females.

This year, data on the incoming cohort was analyzed and distance traveled is being measured to better understand individual progress and performance. This was instituted when the new principal arrived and will continue so that incoming cohort data can be

examined year-on-year. Currently the school compares itself with other schools only on attendance, as it is the only school in New York dealing with this narrow range of students.

Each month, case studies are analyzed in a staff meeting when the performance and progress of particular students are examined, and every six weeks, at the end of each marking period, data from the whole student body is analyzed. Other than those times, academic teachers meet during common planning periods and item analysis is carried out to identify strengths and weaknesses, along with the analysis of student work to identify students needing additional support and to assess portfolio and work folders to monitor effective teaching strategies. However, the school recognizes that further professional development is needed to embed the use of data.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: 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 undeveloped**

When they first enroll, students create their own goals from their school record and discuss these on a one-to-one basis with their advisor, a teacher at the school with an advisory caseload of students. Regular student surveys are carried out for students to assess their perceived level of progress towards those goals, but these surveys look at achievement levels rather than skills levels. There is, however, no formalized system of goal setting in the school for students. Currently, the student advisor helps individual students to go through their progress and aims for their senior year in possession of 30 of the 44 credits needed to graduate. This is an aim or aspiration rather than a goal, as it is not broken down into action steps. Next year, trimesters are replacing semesters to make credit accumulation easier by breaking them down into smaller time frames. This methodology very much depends on the “what” to achieve rather than the “how” to achieve it, however, and the school recognizes the need for a culture change. A few advisors are beginning to use measurable targets, but this is not widespread.

Every student in the school is regarded as being a particular focus area, so all students are given the opportunity for whatever academic intervention, counseling or other help the school can provide. The Diploma Plus model is particularly useful to the school’s cohort, because it allows students to achieve credits by accumulating competences and skills rather than the amount of time spent in class. However, the emphasis currently is on the number of credits to gain, without interim goals that would help students understand how to gain them. High expectations are conveyed to all students, although non-academic reasons sometimes prevent students living up to them. Parent participation is very low, despite the school’s best efforts, and the school has to attempt to raise students’ expectations of themselves as self-esteem and confidence may be low when students arrive.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.**

#### **This area of the school’s work is proficient**

The Diploma Plus model allows the school to combine its Regents programs with skills and competences that are transferable and useful for studies, work and later life. Initial diagnostic assessments in English language arts and mathematics are used at enrollment

and there are plans to develop the results of these into individual profiles of students' existing skills and skills needs on arrival at the school. The project-based learning at the heart of the program means what is learned can be linked to the real life experiences of the students. The curriculum is individualized in each classroom, according to the students and their needs and interests. This means there is generally a high level of engagement.

Differentiation is carried out in class by level and by activity, although not enough account is taken of students' preferred learning styles. Students are grouped in a variety of ways for most classes and, many times, students are working individually on work based on their interests or needs. For example, in an art class students were working on their own interpretations of block design, using a variety of media including wood and paper, and in a music class, students were learning the piano by playing the types of music they favored, including classical, blues and rock.

Each student has their own program to progress them in the best way for them. Further credits can be gained by attendance at the after-school program offering extra tuition, and independent study is also accredited. Almost 20% students dropped out of the school this year. The school is planning to provide GED programs next year to give a realistic alternative to the current curriculum for those for whom it will be more appropriate.

Staffing decisions are based on student and program needs and staff are now selected on their desire to work with transfer school students, areas of expertise, and willingness to work with data. When it was found that the biggest credit deficiency was in global and US history, an extra social studies teacher was hired so classes could be made smaller.

Budgeting decisions are also driven by student needs. The school applied for and received an extended day grant for the after school program to facilitate accelerated credits. An important factor in helping students to achieve is feeling valued by using good equipment and last year a number of electric pianos were purchased for music, and the gym contains state-of-the-art weight training equipment. Scheduling decisions are based on issues arising from data and the electives program is an example of this. Based on students' interests and staff abilities, these are accredited programs that run twice per week and include drama, chorus, dance, film, softball and double dutch.

Staff and student relationships are close and a great deal of mutual respect is apparent. Students feel valued and cared for and there is a strong emotional and social support network across the school, including the guidance team, the teaching staff, in both their advisory and academic roles, and the administration. Student attendance is a high priority of the school, but is an ongoing challenge because of the non-academic issues that prevented students from succeeding in previous schools. There are plans for interns to be employed next year to visit students at their homes to support them in achieving good attendance patterns.

#### **Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and 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 well developed.**

A criterion for staff joining the school is a willingness to work with data, combined with high expectations of themselves and all students. Above all is the belief in partnerships between staff, students and the school and the ability to form close relationships with students.

Professional development is driven by staff and student needs. The current focus is on case conferencing, curriculum planning and working with data, such as skills analysis of

running records. The principal is formalizing professional development by formulating templates that include needs analysis, evaluation and impact measurements. The coach provides much of the professional development, although external trainers and national conferences are also used. Peer professional development is encouraged, and turn keying of external training is common. The principal has also facilitated interschool professional development, so staff can learn from other schools. This is proving effective as new ideas are being generated and staff can relate more to students' previous experiences.

The principal and assistant principal visit classrooms every day and carry out formal observations as mandated. All visits include some kind of constructive feedback. Peer observations are encouraged, especially for new teachers. In some departments, such as history, peer observations are routine. There is a high level of collaboration across the school among all staff, who work in a variety of teams, including subject teams, support teams and teams of staff who work with individual students. Although this is her first year in post, the principal is highly respected by teachers and students. She has successfully changed many areas in the school, although bigger changes are planned for next year, when she can work with her own plans.

The complex organization of enrollment is managed very well. There are four intakes per semester and the parent coordinator acts as gatekeeper for intake and orientation, taking calls and arranging for Saturday interviews. Those who enroll have a three-day orientation, which includes diagnostic assessment and program design. Graduation is similarly well organized, with clear procedures. Youth development is a high priority of the school, with an advisor, who acts as the connection between school and family and as confidante and academic guide. The school works with a number of external organizations, such as The New York Mission, which is based in the school and provides internships, counseling and academic support, and Harlem School of the Arts, which provides dance teachers on site.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: 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.**

Rather than relying solely on the Comprehensive Education Plan, which was set before she took up her position, the principal also uses her principal's performance review as the main school plan. She has created benchmarks as measures of success, along with action steps, including timelines and responsibilities, and staff are becoming more practiced in using them in their own planning.

It is often difficult to get details of students' performance in previous schools, other than credit accumulation, but a data team is being developed to compare students' current performance and progress with their achievement in previous schools and also to make comparisons across and between classes. Systems for measuring progress rates are also under development. The school can demonstrate that 80% students have progressed, based on the data they have gathered.

The school's planning is flexible and changes according to student need, especially if emotional or social circumstances change. The staff are fully involved in planning and revision and are eager to do so. An example of this is the formulation of next year's Comprehensive Education Plan, for which teachers have formed groups to look at different aspects of students' experience and to agree on processes for goal setting, monitoring and measuring impact.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Harlem Renaissance High School (HS 285)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.</b>	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		X	
1.4 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, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		X	

\* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: 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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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 to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.	X		
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 a particular focus area.	X		
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
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.	X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>	X		

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 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
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
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 decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. 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 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
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: 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 accelerating learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
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 being effectively implemented and 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 periodic 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 successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	