



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning  
School**

**High School 348  
511 West 182<sup>nd</sup> Street  
New York  
NY 10033**

**Principal: Brett Kimmel**

**Dates of review: June 5 – 6, 2007**

**Reviewer: Peter Williman**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School will eventually be a high school for grades 6 through 12. Currently it serves 156 students in grades 6 through 7. The student population comprises 96% Hispanic students, 2% Black students, 1% White students, and 1% Asian and students of other ethnic backgrounds. Special education students represent 6.4% of the total school population and 20.5% of students are English language learners. Attendance statistics for 2006 indicate that the school average attendance of 95.2% was well above that of City schools similar schools. The school receives Title 1 funding for 100% of its students. This figure is well above the average that of City schools and similar schools. The school was founded in September 2006 and is one of two academies housed in the same building.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal has ensured the establishment of the school and is well respected for his leadership.
- The principal has a good understanding of data analysis and uses this knowledge effectively to plan school development.
- Effective systems are in place to enable teachers, students and their parents to share understanding of student's progress and next learning steps.
- The progress of school plans is monitored effectively by the administration.
- All members of the school community share an understanding and commitment towards achieving the goals of the school.
- Teachers use curriculum programs effectively to engage students' interest in lessons.
- Provisional figures show student attendance averages are well above that of City schools.
- Good school routines ensure a smooth school day in and out of the classroom.

### What the school needs to improve

- Build on current good practices to ensure that assessment is used systematically at school, grade and classroom levels.
- Develop differentiation to ensure that all students are challenged to achieve their academic potential.
- Continue to monitor the value that is added to students' progress through instruction across and within grades to inform planning.
- Ensure rigor and consistency in assessment judgments within and across classes and grades.
- Analyse data further by groups and subgroups.
- Develop after school activities in line with school philosophy and student needs.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

The Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School has almost completed the first school year since its foundation. The school has made a successful start. The principal with his staff has set high expectations to establish the philosophy, curriculum and organization of the school. As a result, students work hard, are very well behaved and are engaged by their lessons. The school runs smoothly. Parents support the school and are pleased with the progress their children make. The principal is determined to know his students well. He has sound systems in place to monitor students' progress. He analyzes data well to set goals and to plan future directions. Planning is specific and progress is monitored efficiently. The principal has demonstrated a clear capacity to lead development. He is supported by strong leaders, who fulfill their responsibilities well. At class level, systematic collection and use of school generated assessment data is not yet fully in place within and across grades. Teachers know and support their classes well but data is not used sufficiently, as yet, to fully differentiate instruction in order to ensure consistent challenge to all students. This is important as the school is beginning to move more students successfully to higher levels. Lower achieving students make good progress. This school is proficient and, if it continues the present rate of progress, is on the way to becoming a well-developed school.

### 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.**

The principal has instituted the systematic collection of data and as a result knows the progress of students, classes and grades well. He analyzes data effectively to monitor and compare the progress of students in classes and grades. For example, at the end of each marking period there is close analysis of student performance by average scores and by students who are reaching, or not, the expected levels. The available previous data on students is effectively used. Scale scores are scrutinized to assess the value added achievement of students year to year and, as a result, comparisons are made of current class and grade performance. Progress by levels is also measured. The leadership team assist in ensuring subject progress is monitored appropriately. The principal recognizes that insufficient attention is paid to the analysis of groups such as by ethnicity or other categories for comparative purposes. The school is actively pursuing a policy of contacts with similar schools but there are few 6 through 12 schools at a similar stage of development and with similar policies.

Teachers do use data from instruction, formal assessments and information from folders of student work to understand student progress. In better practice this is correlated to provide a clear synopsis of student and class progress, sometimes by the use of technology. Although policies are in place and guidance has been given, the school has not had time to refine moderation of classroom assessment to confirm that it is consistent in quality. This becomes important as the role of grade teams is strengthened and their

number expands. Students are encouraged to reflect constructively on their progress through their journal records and the parent conference arrangements

There is careful continuity to monitoring the achievement of special education students and they progress appropriately. English language learners have been given special attention. Assessments demonstrate they make particularly good progress relative to their early achievement. A significant number have achieved proficiency in English.

**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 well developed.**

The principal uses data analysis well to set statistical goals for improved grade performance by levels. Actual outcomes provide a valuable indicator of school and grade performance and target groups for improvement. These goals are based on a limited school tracking record, currently, but nevertheless have been set to be challenging. Underpinning these goals are annual work plans that the school establishes effectively through whole staff collaborative planning time in the summer recess. The plans set out a demanding schedule to develop curriculum, pedagogy and school culture. They clarify the expectations for the school, classes and grades. Although not specifically time-framed, these plans are very detailed with clear explanations of the role of leadership and faculty in their implementation. They identify the achievable hard evidence which will demonstrate their success.

Teachers plan their next lessons carefully and include areas for re-teaching to ensure their students continuing progress. They compare progress in curriculum content and students’ next steps appropriately with colleagues informally and in team meetings. The sharing of assessment processes and judgments is not sufficiently well developed to ensure students are graded similarly and therefore suitably challenged.

The school places special focus on English language learners and students performing at level 1 and, as a result, they make good progress. Parents of special education students report they are very pleased with the support their children receive and the progress they make. Parents, in general, are very involved to ensure that they understand their children’s progress. Parent conferences require students, following a briefing by their teacher, to make a presentation of the evidence of their progress to their parents and to their teacher or crew leader. Each class is divided into two ‘crews’ to work on projects and expeditions. Each crew is assigned a leader, currently a member of the school faculty. This activity conveys high expectations, strengthens student self-confidence and results in shared understandings of the student’s performance. Equally, it reinforces each student’s knowledge of the next steps for learning. Overall there is a strongly shared commitment to the goals of the school by administration, staff and parents. This is underpinned by the high expectations of student behavior, consistently good student management and the crew organizational structure.

**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 school interweaves the requirements of the mandated curriculum, subject standards and the methodology of the expeditionary schools' philosophy effectively to provide a challenging curriculum. Students are, therefore, fully motivated and engaged in thought provoking activity. They can see the application of skills and concepts in projects, which are real to life. For example, students examine the safety of the Hudson River as a recreational facility. They compare the contribution of presidents, present and past to the country's well being.

Teachers are held to account effectively by observations, the periodic assessments and curriculum maps, which assist the monitoring of class plans and student progress. Assessments in the mathematics program and English language arts provide further evidence. The school requirement that each lesson has objectives stated in terms of student 'can do' competencies and an agenda of activity, enables both students and observers to judge the impact of lessons. Teachers use the outcomes of student responses, conferences and work assessment to plan next lessons. Differentiation is carried out in line with the workshop model of instruction. Students are encouraged to work independently and in heterogeneous groups. However, while some teachers plan some lessons to differentiate more closely to student achievement, lessons, generally, do not sufficiently distinguish the level of individual students or groups to ensure students are fully challenged.

The principal has embraced his new challenge in budget preparation. As a result, subjects are suitably resourced with books. Teachers have been hired, based on student data analysis, to support intervention services, mathematics and technology. Scheduling has provided lessons of a length to suit school plans for students. New teachers are given scheduled support for their pedagogy.

Very effective school procedures, together with students' high enthusiasm for their school, result in a much higher average of attendance than that for City schools. Students speak highly of their teachers. They value the respect and support that they receive in lessons and in their personal development. Teachers do not embarrass them if they fail to understand their work. They know teachers will provide more explanations, sometimes through help after school. Each crew leader is a mentor to individual students. Advisory sessions provide time to support students' social and personal skills.

**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 proficient.**

The principal has demonstrated his clear leadership capacity in successfully establishing the school. As a new principal in a new school, he has implemented rigorous hiring procedures in gathering a team of leaders and faculty who have high expectations of students and who, from the beginning, have been given responsibility to translate school philosophy into plans. The principal leads by example in the effective use of data and this will be put to the test as the school moves into its second round of planning. As yet, the collection and use of data is not fully and systematically integrated across the school but this is developing.

The collaborative annual planning integrates significant professional development opportunities for teachers to think through practices and instruction. The leadership structure instituted by the principal ensures that each leader has a clear responsibility for aspects of professional development. For example, the mentor teacher is very skilled in developing class management and pedagogical skills for new teachers. This support is a necessary focus for the school in order to have consistency in practices. The principal maintains the broad overview through observations and knows his teachers well. Teachers know each other's work from informal observation, but the principal recognizes inter-class visitations are not a current practice and this is a point for improvement.

Efficient scheduling provides for frequent weekly subject and grade team meetings. These regular meetings enable leaders and faculty to be on the same page of understanding. As a result, procedures are understood and democratically confirmed, communication is well maintained and the school runs very smoothly. Meeting agendas tend to focus on curriculum plans and logistical developments because the school is in its infancy. Data management and evaluation is not generally a feature. The school does, however schedule specific meetings to highlight students' needs.

The distinctive culture of the school and the attendant curriculum results from the close association the school has through its partnership with Expeditionary Learning. Students fulfill a broad curriculum with significant hands on work within the teamwork of a 'crew on exploration' and this is stimulating to their academic and personal development. The school has not extended its partnerships to provide after school activities, which students, parents and the principal would like to see.

**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.**

School plans are clear and concise in their focus on school development. They include specific responsibilities and actions, the attainment of which is measurable. These plans are set within the school's monthly and half yearly reviews to ascertain their progress. Although the school does not have identified similar schools with whom to make comparisons of its progress, the principal and his leadership team maintain an effective evaluation of student progress within and across classes to judge the progress of the school's strategic plan.

The structure of periodic and other school assessment in combination with the school's half yearly intensive reviews by class and by school ensures revision at the macro and micro level of planning to keep plans for student achievement on course. This demonstrates the flexibility within the system and as a result there is an effective rolling program of review and planning. The school is currently proficient overall in its data and planning systems. If the school continues the present rate of progress, it will be well on its way to becoming a well-developed school.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School (HS 348)</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	