The New York City Department of Education

Quality Review Report

The Heritage School

High School 680

1680 Lexington Avenue
New York
NY 10029

Principal: Vivian Orlen

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Reviewer: Clive Parsons

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well
What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Heritage School was founded by Teachers College 10 years ago. It was intended to serve students from the East Harlem community. The founders wanted to create a school where the arts played an integral role across curriculum areas. The school is housed in a community cultural arts center. The building is shared with a number of community organizations.

The school has remained small, with 331 students presently enrolled across grades 9 through 12. The proportion of special education students, at approximately 17%, is about the same as in similar schools and schools across the City. The proportion of English language learners, at 5% of the student body, is well below other schools. The school receives Title 1 funding for 73% of its students, above the proportion for City wide and similar schools. Attendance is showing a small downward trend, but at 85% in 2005, it was above that of other schools across the City and well above that in similar schools. Approximately 64% of students are Hispanic and 34% are Black. Just over 1% of students are White and just under 1% are Asian.

This is an Empowerment School. Empowerment Schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment Schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is successfully raising school-wide expectations of what students can achieve.
- Many teachers are willingly engaging in the opportunities now offered for collaborative activity, which is improving their practice.
- Students' work and achievement data are increasingly effectively used as the focus of discussion between staff members.
- The principal has introduced much needed systems and structures which are increasing the rigor and consistency of the school's work.
- Increasing attention is being directed at getting to know the personal as well as academic needs of students so that these needs can be better met.
- Students are responding well to the increased opportunities being offered to them to have a voice in the functioning of the school.
- The school's challenging goal for student attendance is now being pursued with rigor through increased resources and improved coordination and collaboration.
- The principal is successfully building the capacity of other adults in the school, and effectively marshalling external support, to implement the changes identified.
- The school's new policy on students' use of electronic devices has been successful because it was well-considered, strategically planned and consistently implemented.
- Increasing numbers of families are working with the school as partners in the education of students.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue the investment in improving the quality of classroom experiences for students.
- Ensure greater consistency between teachers in the implementation of school requirements and expectations.
- Utilize the small school environment to more effectively achieve the school's goal of personalizing learning for students.
- Continue to evaluate and restructure the curriculum to ensure that the needs, interests and aspirations of students are fully met.
- Build on the positive outcomes from teachers planning and teaching collaboratively to broaden further experiences for students.
- Continue to review the school's vision by articulating the many facets of a future Heritage Graduate in order to drive longer term planning and goals.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school.

The Heritage School has started its considerable journey towards proficiency under the skilled and experienced leadership of the new principal. She has, since her arrival at the beginning of this school year, brought much needed focus and direction to the school. She is marshalling and directing additional resources and enabling those that already exist. Staff, students and parents are actively taking the increasing opportunities to have a voice in the future direction of the school and to implement the changes and improvements being identified. Leadership and responsibility are being dispersed strategically, while accountability, which is currently weak, is being strengthened systematically. Expectations are being raised, albeit from a low base.

The school has some way to go before it reaches proficiency. Data is not analyzed and used systematically, the curriculum is narrow and students are not sufficiently engaged with learning. However, there is a growing acceptance of the need for change, collaborative activity is strengthening collegiality and students' experiences are starting to improve.

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 undeveloped.

The school has well-established procedures for tracking students towards graduation. However, there is little evidence of using such data to understand student performance and progress. For example, the needs assessment within the Comprehensive Education Plan analyses data by subgroups, including gender and ethnicity, as well as for English language learners and special education students. However, there is little evidence of this leading to further exploration or program modifications. Students know the grading policies adopted by individual staff, although they also point to significant variations in their application. They are not always clear and open, with some unduly emphasising students' prior knowledge, skills or abilities. Using students' work and evaluating data have not been a consistent agenda for teams when meeting during scheduled time. Variations in the performance of different classes have not always been evaluated and explained.

Practices and procedures are improving on a number of fronts, however. The principal is engaging in a more systematic evaluation of credit accumulation and Regents passes. Questions are being asked as new data sets become available. Comparisons are being made, such as between classes and different subject areas. Students' work and their achievement data are increasingly used as the focus of discussion between staff members. Teachers have embarked on developing their own interim and diagnostic tests to be able to identify gaps in students' understanding and skills and to be able to track their progress. This in turn is supporting greater reliability and consistency when grading students. Cohort data is being explored to identify underperforming students, characteristics they have in common and what the reasons for their slow progress are.

The principal is also concerned to ensure that systems to disseminate data to students and to involve them in understanding their performance and progress become more formalised.

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.

The principal is increasing opportunities for the faculty to engage in collaboratively establishing goals and plans for the improvement of the school. Groups have been established to review and explore key aspects of the school's work. Greater expectations are being placed on the outcomes from scheduled collaborative planning time. The existing Comprehensive Education Plan has been shared with faculty. Many teachers are willingly engaging in the opportunities now offered for collaborative activity, which is improving their practice.

Data and students' work are an increasing focus. Discussions are emerging from which teacher, student and class goals are being formulated. Increased focus is being placed on identifying and supporting those students most in need of improvement, including special education students and English language learners, as well as students failing multiple courses. Support from external specialists is being used effectively in this work.

Expectations of students have not been consistently high enough across the school. For example, students talk about having their aspirations lowered when discussing possible college applications. The principal is successfully countering this attitude and raising school-wide expectations of what students can achieve academically. Increasing attention is being directed at getting to know the personal as well as academic needs of students, so that these needs can be better met. Increasing numbers of families are working with the school as partners in the education of students. The principal is determined to utilize the small school environment to effectively achieve the school's goal of personalizing learning for students.

Goals and plans are starting to drive the actions of the school community as a result of the systems and structures established by the principal and there is a growing realization that change is necessary. The principal's weekly letter to staff, copied to parents, forms an important part of the improved communication.

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 undeveloped.

Students believe that the curriculum is too narrow and provides them with too few opportunities to engage in subjects and activities that will engage them and motivate them to learn. Too little attention has previously been paid to evaluating why a high proportion of students fail courses, sometimes repeatedly. Too little attention has also been paid to developing and offering alternative solutions. There is little evidence in practice of the school meeting its stated aim of infusing the arts throughout the curriculum. At present curriculum plans are not sufficiently designed to allow teachers to meet the needs of the

students actually being taught. A priority for the principal is to continue to evaluate and restructure the curriculum to ensure that the needs, interests and aspirations of students are fully met. A specific priority is the restructuring of mathematics, especially in the second and third years.

Some teachers do use data and their on-going assessments to help them to differentiate their instruction. This is, however, not school-wide practice. The modification and adaptation of instruction to meet the identified needs of individual and groups of students is weak. Teachers are increasingly being held to account for the quality of their instruction and for the outcomes of their students. Targeted support, including from external specialists, is helping to improve this picture. Nevertheless, student engagement in high quality and challenging learning in lessons remains patchy. The principal is rightly determined to continue the investment made in improving the quality of classroom experiences for students. In general, classroom environments do not sufficiently reflect the accomplishments of students, the intent of the class or the values of the school.

The principal has been able to improve some aspects of scheduling in a short space of time so that, for example, fewer students have gaps in their individual program. Additional expertise has been well-targeted and roles and responsibilities of some members of staff have been modified to good effect. This is all enabling more focused and strategic work. Budgeting decisions are now being made on the basis of student needs that have been identified through data analysis.

Improving partnerships with external agencies, including the on-site mental health clinic for students, are contributing to an increased awareness of the need to respond to the personal, as well as academic needs of students. The new advisory program is an integral part of this for grade 9 students, but is at present the only example of an articulated system to personalize the experience for students and teachers. Students recognise that there is an adult on the staff to whom they could turn. Students are responding well to the increased opportunities being offered to them to have a voice in the functioning of the school. The school's challenging goal for student attendance is now being pursued with rigor. Resources have been increased, new personnel appointed and coordination and collaboration improved.

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.

New staff have been carefully appointed to align with the needs identified by the principal. The roles and responsibilities of existing staff have similarly been realigned. Instructional specialists have been hired to support staff in developing their practice. Staff are increasingly valuing the professional development being provided and are responding positively. This is leading to a better appreciation that change is necessary, as well as greater openness and collaboration in working to achieve it. Consequently, the principal is successfully building the capacity of other adults in the school and effectively marshalling external support to implement the changes identified.

The principal observes classroom teaching and has a good view of the effectiveness of each teacher's instruction. There are limited visits by teachers to other classrooms, but increased collaborative discussion about student work and achievement data is underway. More open discussion and more candid self-evaluation are starting to occur in response to

the principal's raised expectations. She recognizes the need to build on the positive outcomes from teachers' planning and teaching collaboratively to broaden further the experiences for students. This includes, for example, establishing common instructional goals, both horizontally and vertically and developing alternative courses for students who have met the basic requirements.

Some staff are finding change challenging, but the principal has gained the respect of the school community for her determination to improve student outcomes. She has a very good capacity to effect change. She has introduced much needed systems and structures which are increasing the rigor and consistency of the school's work. While the school functions reasonably smoothly and procedures are clear, not all staff are yet able to fulfil all expectations fully and consistently. The school's new policy on students' use of electronic devices provides a positive example of change. It is successful because it was well-considered, strategically planned and is being consistently implemented.

New partnerships, such as with the Peer Health Exchange and the National Academy for Excellence in Teaching, have been established and others, including with Teachers College, are being revitalised. These are carefully aligned to support students, staff and parents in achieving greater success.

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.

Much effort this year has gone into establishing systems and structures to monitor and evaluate the quality and impact of the school's work, as well as providing greater opportunities for collaborative planning and goal setting. Overall, staff, students and parents are responding positively to this new direction, even if they are finding it somewhat challenging. Improvements and priorities have been clearly identified and plans introduced to address them. The principal is acutely aware of the need to articulate the many facets of a future Heritage Graduate and 'backward plan' this vision onto the profile of new entrants in order to drive longer term planning and goals.

Comparisons within the data collected are now being used to ask searching questions about effectiveness and impact. This is driving staff to look at the relative progress within classes and subject areas, as well as key groups such as by gender or ethnicity. The reliability and validity of the underlying data is being strengthened by greater collaborative activity. This is leading to a greater recognition that improvements are needed and increased determination to effect that change. Greater focus on the data is also driving teachers to review their classroom practices and to seek ways to provide more differentiated support and challenge in the classroom. The flexibility and agility with which plans and intentions are modified are improving as a result.

Greater monitoring, review and evaluation have already led to changes, such as with scheduling, and are driving more significant change for the future. The culture and climate of the school is being changed to a more reflective and questioning environment. The principal knows the school very well and is successfully driving forward the changes required to improve outcomes for students.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Heritage School (HS 680)	Ø	✓	+
Quality Score	X		

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.	Ø	✓	+
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: • each student, classroom, grade level,	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: • ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*	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: • all other categories of interest to the school*	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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1	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.

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.	Ø	✓	+
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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2	X		

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.	Ø	✓	+
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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3	X		
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.	**Ø**	**✓**	**+**
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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
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.	**Ø**	**✓**	**+**
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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	