



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

America's School of Heroes

Middle School 137

**109-15 98th Street
Queens
NY 11417**

Principal: Laura Mastrogiovani

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**Reviewers: Ted Solow &
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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The America's School of Heroes, Middle School 137, is located in the Ozone Park area in southern Queens. The school serves 1,894 students in grades 6 through 8. The ethnic composition of the student body is 51% Asian, 35% Hispanic, 10% Black, and 4% White. The male to female ratio is 51.32% to 48.69%.

The small percentage of students receiving mandated special education services is 9%. English language learners, who speak Punjabi and Spanish, comprise 8% of the student body. The school receives Title 1 funding for 71% of the students.

Attendance is 93.1%, which is above the average for City and similar schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The administrative team focuses on teaching and learning within a culture of high expectations for all.
- The staff uses the information gathered from assessment data to guide instructional activities.
- The school has well defined intervention policies and practices in place for struggling students.
- Procedures, policies and school rules are known and followed by students and staff.
- The students are actively engaged and focused on learning.
- The principal provides strong leadership and is highly respected by staff, students and parents.
- The administrative team is highly visible and accessible.
- There is a culture of mutual respect between administrators, teachers and students.
- Professional development activities are designed to have a direct impact on the progress of students.
- The building is well maintained and richly decorated with many examples of student work reflecting current activities.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand strategies for engaging parents to become active partners in the school and in their child's learning.
- Invite strategic partnerships to sit on the school leadership team.
- Develop a professional development calendar that outlines all internal and external activities available to staff

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The principal is an inspiring leader. In her two year tenure she has steadily moved the school to its current level of high performance. Systems designed to improve student performance and progress have been put in place through the effective use of data. The staff, coaches, support personnel, and administrators have formed an effective collegial and collaborative instructional team to move the school forward. Staff members know their classroom efforts are appreciated and supported as they are encouraged to keep up the high quality of instruction throughout the school.

Professional development activities are infused into the daily life of the school. All staff members actively participate in the many opportunities that are offered during the school day, as well as after school and on weekends.

The principal and her cabinet have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

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 well developed.

The school collects data from many formal and informal assessment tools. All data is continually updated as soon as the information becomes available. Data generated from all sources is used by the administration and staff to identify needs and strengths in literacy, mathematics, and content area subjects and to identify at-risk students. For example the coaches identify low level 3's, high 2's and high 1's in literacy for specific targeted instruction and monitor their performance and progress on a regular basis. Each staff member receives a data folio that contains the latest data for their new classes during the August orientation meetings so that appropriate differentiated activities can begin on the first day of school. The staff analyzes student data and has become quite adept at recognizing the progress throughout the building. Student data is analyzed to monitor the progress of each ethnic group within the school, male and female performance and attendance. When weaknesses are revealed specific support measures are put in place.

The principal focuses on the continuous review of the data, performance, and progress for students enrolled in the academic rigorous Regents preparation classes in each grade. Portfolio data is regularly reviewed for students in other groups through analysis of the generated data. The administrative team reviews the school's past performance by looking at cohort performance data from year to year. Comparisons are made with the other middle schools in the district by measuring annual student progress indicators, attendance, and number of suspensions. Graphic data has been prepared and shared with the staff to show three year trends in reading and mathematics for each cohort.

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 has effectively communicated her goals to the school community. The staff works harmoniously within a culture of collegiality and collaboration to support school, grade, class, and student goals. The principal meets with every teacher at the start of the school year to establish appropriate instructional goals for classes and grades. In June the principal meets with the teachers to evaluate their efforts and plan for the following year. School goals are continuously revisited, re-evaluated, and modified based on the analysis of current student performance data and school wide trends. The school leadership team reviews data from “snap shot” visits, feedback, and the principal’s observations. Teacher data folios enable them to analyze student performance and skills, and successfully plan specific interventions. Students establish goals with their teachers and review progress towards meeting goals during conferencing sessions. Students are able to articulate subject area goals, as well as their current performance levels in literacy and mathematics.

At-risk student data is assessed and recommendations are made by the pupil personnel team to identify and plan interventions with an emphasis on individualized instruction. All identified students are then monitored for progress. The school has academic intervention classes on each grade level where students receive extra support services and help during the afternoon extended school day. To meet the needs of a group of struggling 8th graders with behavioral and attendance issues, the principal created an afternoon school that meets daily from 12:00 – 6:00 pm to address their specific needs. Initial reports indicate this group is making good progress and are on schedule to graduate on time.

The school reaches out to parents at many types of meetings and at school wide events. Parents receive notices via e-mail, backpack or by mail in addition to the quarterly report cards. The principal recognizes the need for more parent involvement in all school planning and implementation activities in order to encourage parents to become active partners in the school life of their child.

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 well developed.

The school follows the curriculum as mandated by the City. All classes, including English as a second language and special education classes follow each subject’s pacing calendar and State standards. The major focus in all classes, to develop the use of accountable talk and differentiation of instructional activities, has been effectively implemented. All classes use the workshop model of instruction which facilitates the differentiated instructional activities used in the classroom. Each subject teacher has student portfolios that exhibit samples of student work that are used effectively to monitor the performance and progress of individual students across classes and grades. Teachers are held accountable for student progress by maintaining a data folio that contains all assessment data. Data is analyzed to inform instructional practices. Students are actively engaged and on task during independent, group, and whole class instructional activities. Students were able to articulate what their responsibilities were during group work and the expected

outcomes at the conclusion of the exercise. All members of the administrative team regularly review performance data from academic subject classes and grades. Students stated they know and can trust many adults at the school.

All budgetary, scheduling, and staffing decisions are based on student needs. For example, to meet the needs of struggling students a portion of the budget was used to create homogeneous academic intervention classes in every grade. Content area specialists are selected to accommodate specific instructional programs.

Attendance procedures are known to all and are explained in the handbooks. Student absence triggers an immediate response. The attendance committee meets regularly to review current cases and to discuss strategies to improve the attendance for identified students. Students and classes are recognized for excellent attendance.

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.

Prospective staff members are asked to visit the school and observe a class with selected personnel. Class observations are discussed and successful interviewees teach a demonstration lesson. All future teachers must have a commitment to use data to drive instructional activities and have appropriate content knowledge in their field of education. This process enables the school to select highly qualified and effective personnel.

Professional development decisions are based on student performance data, a staff needs survey, regional and City requirements, and recommendations from the administrative team. The professional development committee meets weekly to discuss and assess what occurs in the classrooms in order to determine professional development priorities. To meet the needs of all staff members, useful differentiated sessions are planned for new teachers, special education staff, English as a second language specialists, and content area teachers. Study groups meet at lunch time and during preparation periods to explore specific professional development topics. There is also a regional calendar for specific training modules that selected staff attends and then effectively turnkey the training to other department members. Many professional development activities offered to the large staff and the principal recognizes the need to advertise their availability through a monthly calendar in order build capacity.

The members of the administrative team are highly visible. Teachers stated they are visited daily by administrators and coaches and receive useful feedback. All teachers are observed a minimum of two times a year culminating with written reports that include suggestions. Teachers experiencing difficulty are provided with additional support and are encouraged to intervisit with their colleagues to observe best practices. All classroom visits effectively support the teachers' efforts to improve student learning outcomes.

Teams of teachers and administrators meet frequently to review portfolios, student writing, assessments of data, rubrics, pacing calendars, and units of study across the content areas. The principal meets with each teacher twice a year to assess student performance and to review goals. All practices result in the improvement of the teaching and learning process.

The principal is recognized for her leadership and management skills. She is described by all members of the school community as being caring, accessible, a good listener, and knowledgeable about middle school education. The building is well maintained and richly decorated with many examples of current student work. All rules, regulations, policies, and procedures are known by all and followed and contribute to the orderly atmosphere throughout the building.

The school has established partnerships with the South Queens Boys and Girls Club and the CHAMPS program that provide academic assistance and recreational activities daily from 3 to 6 pm. The principal recognizes a need to invite the partners to become part of the school leadership team, in order to provide an additional perspective regarding school needs.

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 well developed.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is prepared from analysis of student, class, grade and cohort data, observations by the administrative team, and professional development requirements. The school leadership team meets monthly to review the plan and make recommendations for needed revisions. During the course of the data analysis of sub-skills in literacy from formal and informal assessments indicated there were weaknesses in making inferences and drawing conclusions across all classes in the school. The school leadership team revisited the goals in English language arts and addressed the concern by offering professional development study groups to address these areas of need. A series of mini-lessons were created to focus on highlighted topics. The coaches and administrative team monitored these revisions by reviewing assessment data and classroom activities for effectiveness.

Use of data across all segments of the school identifies the necessary resources to achieve goals. English language learners require differentiated learning materials, such as leveled novels, that are coordinated with the core curriculum. The 500 students in the advanced Regents preparation classes are continuously monitored for progress. Resources to support the laboratory activities and academic support for course A mathematics students are determined by staff input, administrative reviews and data analysis of students meeting performance standards. The school has also addressed the need of the large number of 8th graders who apply to specialized high schools by providing test preparation courses. Through these efforts the number of students entering these schools has shown a steady increase since this program has been implemented.

The school reviews data from many sources to determine gains and area of deficiency. The principal regularly reviews data from other district middle schools to monitor trends and measure the progress at her school. Results of analyses guide the schools long- and short- range goals for academic success. The staff is finely attuned to using data to improve student outcomes.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: America's School of Heroes (MS 137)	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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"> 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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 knows 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.	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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