



# **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: March 6 - 7, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Paul Smith**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Harlem Renaissance High School is a transfer high school with 222 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 62% Black, 36% Hispanic, 2% other students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 4% special education students. Boys account for 40% of the students enrolled and girls account for 60%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 -2007 was 62%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 63% eligibility.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal has promoted clear, shared plans among all members of the school community to make the school a better place for learning.
- There is a commitment from staff to develop each student into a productive member of society.
- Teachers show great respect for their students and treat their diverse needs sympathetically.
- The principal and faculty are constantly reflecting on their practices and seeking the best strategy for further improvement.
- Students' attention is rightly focused on social skills that are given a high priority in the curriculum and evaluation of it.
- The arts are emphasized in the curriculum and provide a focus for students' engagement.
- The curriculum has been successfully broken down into skills and competences that enable detailed evaluation of students' performance.
- Differentiation is integral to instruction in every course, so meeting the needs of each student more precisely.
- Professional development is a strength of the school, leading to common practices in assessing and monitoring students' progress.
- Self-evaluation by both students and teachers enables them to take greater responsibility for their own improvement.

### What the school needs to improve

- Place the responsibility for the attendance and punctuality of a particular student in the hands of a single person.
- Ensure all teachers practice consistent discipline to improve the relationships between staff and students.
- Continue to seek innovative means to engage parents in a partnership with the school to support their children's academic achievement.
- Assess and report each concept and skill taught in a unit of work, so students can better focus on the specific areas they need to improve.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### **Progress made since the last review**

The school has made some progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

### **Overall Evaluation**

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

Harlem Renaissance High School lives up to its name in that it provides a chance for students to start again in a different setting. It has a holistic view of education centered on the individual and addresses all factors that interfere with the academic progress of the student, which can be many and varied. The help and support the school gives to each student, along with its emphasis on possible destinations after high school, provides a sense of security. This, together with the effort devoted to the acquisition of social skills, are a necessary base on which to build academic success with these students.

The trimester year has been the catalyst for many changes. Each course is now shorter, so students' motivation is better as their focus is more concentrated and they see results of their efforts more quickly. In addition, the curriculum was rethought to complete all the skills and competences required more efficiently, hence no time is wasted and students appreciate the greater pace of lessons. A bias towards the arts has proved motivational and popular, allowing students to succeed in many varied areas.

Since the previous Quality Review report the school has made great strides in providing an individualized program of study for each student and within that differentiated tasks for each lesson. Greater cooperation between teachers has resulted in more targeted instruction, goals that are more precise for each student and common assessment practices. Many students thrive on the fact that this gives them greater responsibility for their own learning through self-evaluation and they make good progress. However, the lack of parental commitment remains, and those students who find it difficult to achieve the degree of self-discipline necessary, too often fail to attend or arrive late, so making it difficult for them to attain their goals. The inquiry team has made some progress in re-engaging these students who are in danger of not graduating.

### **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 the student's progress over time.**

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

Teachers know their students as individuals and treat them as such. They often update their information weekly and by working a trimester year, formal, summative assessments are completed more frequently providing yet further information. As all this is shared with students, they know how far they are on the way to achieving their goals.

So many factors outside the control of the school influence the progress of each student that comparisons with past years or similar schools are difficult. However, the school collects a vast array of data on their own students from standardized assessments, portfolio reviews, and quizzes to classroom observation, so teachers monitor students' achievement thoroughly both for individuals and classes. The tri-annual retreats provide an opportunity to share information on students' academic performance as well as their progress in meeting social or emotional goals and so form an overall picture. Information on students when they first arrive is paramount. The self-evaluative "My Renaissance" provides the school with a base on which to build and promotes in the student a new sense of direction.

There are significantly more girls at the school, yet the progress of boys has been a concern, especially in English language arts. This has led to the school instigating an all-male teaching group, with significantly improved motivation and better results. This is only one side of the school's holistic view of education, the foundation of a Young Men's group, to explore the social and emotional issues relevant to this age group, proved so popular that there are now two Young Women's groups to cover similar, but different issues for the girls.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.**

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

From the introductory course onwards, there is a rigorous, negotiated goal-setting structure. This covers social and personal skills such as attendance and participation, as well as academic achievement. Teachers review these goals frequently, in some case every lesson, and formally assess them through a one-to-one interview every six weeks. Students have an input as they regularly evaluate their own performance and set targets for their future progress, so giving them greater ownership of their goals. As courses are based on specific skills and competencies, information is available to break down academic assessment and goal setting more finely. This is not commonly used in reporting and so fails to concentrate the efforts of each student on areas where they are least successful, so reducing their overall achievement.

The inquiry team has given particular attention to those students who have yet to graduate after four or more years in high school. The team shares a great deal of information on each student before a unique plan is developed, This includes input from outside agencies in an attempt to address issues beyond the control of the school, such as family or economic difficulties. This wide-ranging approach has proved successful in overcoming many of the barriers preventing a successful outcome for the student.

Parents believe that expectations are high, but this may focus on social and emotional areas, such as behavior, participation and cooperation rather than academic achievement. Few parents attend the frequent opportunities provided for them to have an input into their child's education. Consequently, it is difficult for the school to form a meaningful partnership with many parents, to the benefit of their child.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

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

The school provides an appropriate and broad curriculum with a strong emphasis on the arts, which are a vehicle for student engagement. Courses are designed to include frequent assessment, so teachers hold information on each student in such detail that they are able to alter their teaching to meet students’ individual needs. This occurs as a matter of course, as one teacher stated, “I really, really think how I can be more effective with each student.” Thus, teaching focused on different levels of ability and different competencies, is both common and necessary for each student to make progress. In addition, cross-course conferences allow teachers to compare their experiences with specific students and so evolve a common approach, leading to instruction that is more effective.

Students like the individualized study programs and varied methods of assessment as they allow them to succeed in different ways. They work hard to complete the presentation of a portfolio of their best work each trimester, as it is manageable. Teachers and students work closely together and consequently, in the majority of cases, relationships between staff and students are good as the students feel that their teachers really care about them as individuals. Equally, teachers hold themselves responsible for the success of their students, even though they and the students must overcome many barriers.

Despite a comprehensive package of measures, improving attendance and reducing lateness has proved difficult. It is not helped by a system that divides the responsibility for the attendance of a particular student between many individuals. Consequently, follow-ups are not always effective, as they are not coordinated sufficiently speedily.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

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

The personal development of the students is central to their academic success, as one directly affects the other. Hence, the school succeeds in providing a secure setting in which every student feels valued. The students like being in a small school where they are well known, but it is the staff inside it that are truly valued, as one student said, “People here seem like they care.”

The school works hard to provide the chance for students to take responsibility for their own progress, through extensive self-evaluation. Additionally, the school council is a focus for many students to take responsibility for improving their school as a community and seeing the consequences of their decisions.

An important partnership with NYC Mission Society is central to the school’s aims as it provides a sense of direction for students by giving them the opportunity of an internship with a local employer. This is very popular as it gives paid employment, but in addition, focuses the students’ minds on the skills required when they leave school.

The school targets the professional development of teachers on practical issues that are effective in improving the progress of the students in both social areas, such as diffusing potential crises, and academic ones, such as focusing teaching on central concepts. Case studies are frequently used to bring reality into discussions and lasting change to instruction. The principal conducts formal and informal classroom observations with written feedback, which staff value as it gives practical assistance to improve instruction.

The school runs smoothly due to a dedicated staff, clear procedures and a desire to improve. Students believe discipline to be generally fair and there are protocols in place to resolve disputes. However, inconsistency of approach among teachers potentially causes conflict with students.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

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

A structured three-year plan interprets the principal's clear vision for the future, which both the faculty and the students fully support, as they played a major part in its development. Each step in the plan is arranged in a logical order, to better accomplish its implementation, such as the change to a three-semester year leading to shorter courses and necessitating a change to lesson planning. All this facilitated the goal of developing more appropriate, individualized tuition.

Teachers are dedicated to improving student performance and feel responsible for the success of their students. As a result, individuals, teams and the whole faculty are relentless in their quest to seek new ways to improve the progress of individual students. Teachers are given the independence to try different methods of instruction with different students, hence great variety of classroom practice is provided. Teachers cooperate well and take ideas from each other to see if they can replicate success. Thus, changes to plans are frequent and firmly based on teacher assessment of student progress.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Harlem Renaissance High School</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>			X		

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

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?			X		
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?			X		
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?			X		
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?			X		
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			X		

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?				X	
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?			X		
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?			X		
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?			X		
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?			X		
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?		X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			X		

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?			X		
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?				X	
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the School's academic goals for all students?			X		
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?			X		
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?		X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X		

**Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?			X		
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?			X		
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?			X		
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?					X
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?			X		
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					
			X		

**Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?			X		
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					
			X		

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>