



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning  
School**

**Middle School 348  
511 West 182 Street  
New York  
NY 10033**

**Principal: Brett Kimmel**

**Dates of review: May 20 - 21, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Ronald Feinstein**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School has 233 students from grades 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 1% Black, 98% Hispanic, and 1% Native American students. The student body includes 25% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 95.0%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 100% eligibility.

The school will expand to a high school, by admitting its first grade 9 students, in fall 2008.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school conveys consistently high expectations to students and their caregivers.
- Every effort is made to support the academic and personal growth of each student.
- The school frequently and creatively provides students and their families with information about the goals set for each student and their progress.
- The school has enviable attendance rates resulting from rigorous support from the parent coordinator and efficient monitoring procedures.
- The curriculum is compelling and engaging, encouraging students' positive attitudes to school.
- The principal and staff have a clear vision for the school's imminent expansion to include the first high school grade 9 in fall 2008.
- The highly motivated and articulate staff work closely together to make sense of data and determine ambitious standards of student mastery.
- Policies, procedures and routines are documented and consistently applied, which enables the school to run extremely smoothly.
- Teachers and students treat each other with respect and honor.

### What the school needs to improve

- Dedicate time in teachers' schedules for intervisitations to observe and share practice.
- Support teachers to use a wide variety of data to make timely planning modifications that match student's learning needs exactly.
- Ensure that teachers use data to plan and differentiate instruction for students who can be accelerated as well as those who still struggle.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### Progress made since the last review

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

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is well developed.**

Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School completes its second year in June 2008 and will expand to grade 9 in fall 2008, as it works toward the 6-12 continuum. The school partners with Expeditionary Learning and the New York City Outward Bound Center, building on the center's eighteen years of experience. Expeditionary Learning provides extensive professional development to teachers of all content areas through a challenging set of connected, real world projects called learning expeditions. Parents and students are enthusiastic about the engaging curriculum and comment on the open, honest and respectful environment created by this new school. Each student is grouped with a crew leader in the fall during a four day Outward Bound orientation. The unique school support structure includes principal, crew leaders, instructional guide, mentor teacher, school designer, guidance counselor and parent coordinator. Families are successfully engaged with the school community at every step of goal setting and progress monitoring.

The demands of integrating curriculum and close collaboration at every level place unique demands on scheduling that require dedicated and extensive opportunities for additional common planning time and intervisitation. The inquiry team is focused on seventh grade English language learners who have yet to move beyond the advanced score on the NYSELAT. The team shares strategies with all staff to ensure these students continue to accelerate learning. The school has ambitious goals for students and reacts swiftly when any student fails to meet their goals. The school has set a minimum score of 80% mastery for all students. Immediate intervention strategies are implemented for any student who fails to meet this mark. Staff require additional support to make the best use of all student data to organize intervention strategies and plan work that meets students' needs exactly. There are examples of better practice within the school, but as yet, little opportunity to build capacity by sharing this good work among teachers.

Student achievement is celebrated monthly with honorable mention, honors and high honors for those students above 90%. This year there was 100% parent participation at powerful student-led achievement conferences, which are held three times a year. Local businesses contribute to students' College Savings Accounts adding another component of early college awareness. Students complete at least three expeditions each year integrating science, social studies, mathematics and literacy. The school's emphasis on developing responsible citizens is reflected in school norms posted throughout the building that remind students and staff to be respectful, responsible, open-minded, present, prompt, and prepared. Prior to each school year all staff participates in five weeks of intensive professional development.

## **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 well developed.**

Summative math and literacy data is communicated to each teacher and disaggregated for gender, ethnicity, English language learners and special education students. Math and literacy diagnostics adapted from Teach for America are administered prior to each unit of study and appropriate content and strategies developed to address students’ misconceptions. DRA, Wilson assessment and WRAP are administered twice yearly.

Since few schools exist with the same grade configuration, the principal has affiliated with principals of new small schools in addition to schools within the Outward Bound network. Principals meet monthly to participate in learning walks and share best practices. In Outward Bound schools the crew leader functions as the leader of an advisory each with approximately fifteen students. Crew leaders meet regularly to analyze and discuss a range of classroom data including student work, self-assessments, portfolios and formative assessments. These meetings focus on strategies to share and make sense of data. The continued need to provide professional development support around the analysis and use of data is paramount to maintain the integrity of the school’s philosophy.

**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 well developed.**

Grade level and departmental meetings set content area and student-specific learning targets, which are publicly shared and contribute to accountability. Time is dedicated to adjust and amend plans as living breathing documents. A scope and sequence to accommodate the school’s expansion into the high school grades is under development. Teachers use data and track mastery with a wide range of formal and informal assessment tools. The WHEELS achievement support plan is an individual commitment signed by crew leader, parent and student. The intervention specialist pushes into classrooms and focuses on English language learners. Self-assessment and peer assessment templates align to goals set for each student. All staff members attend a unique five weeks of intensive summer planning. This structure establishes school goals for all members of the community. Regular monthly meetings monitor progress; the mid-year huddle reassesses the learning plan and gathers additional data needed to support students’ mastery of learning targets. The school’s system includes long-term targets, power targets and supporting targets, all of which are standards-based. Learning expectations and consequent behaviors are expressed in student friendly terms. Expeditionary Learning conducts an end-of-year implementation review.

Students lead assessment conferences attended by parents, crew advisor and any other adult the student invites three times a year. While the crew advisor facilitates these powerful opportunities students are well prepared to take charge. Parents are led

through students' portfolios with assignments and assessments harvested from academic classes. Students justify quarterly grades with reference to specific assignments as evidence of mastery. Students share a self evaluation of progress and performance. Students are held accountable for their progress as they explain strengths and areas for improvement. The positive tone of these conferences maintains the focus of assuring future success.

The proactive parent coordinator contributes to the favorable opinions of the school expressed by parents and caregivers. Parents remarked that faculty is always accessible and they are extremely comfortable communicating issues that arise. The high expectations that the school has for its students are exemplified by several opportunities for students, families and caregivers to develop college awareness as early as sixth grade. Each student will have a college savings account and the principal has hired an internship program manager to continue planning for this component.

**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 well developed.**

The school aligns formative assessments with learning targets, provides grade diagnostics for all students and customized diagnostics for special populations. Professional development focuses on differentiation for accelerated students and those who struggle, but this remains an area for potential improvement. The curriculum is organized around fieldwork called learning expeditions aligned to Outward Bound philosophy and state indicators. Learning expeditions include visits to museums and camping experiences. Outward Bound further supports this experiential learning with a teaching artist in residence, a sculptor, a visual artist and an African dancer. A survey asked students to respond to statements such as 'I know how well I am doing in my class,' 'I can get extra help when I need it,' and 'I understand what I am supposed to do.' The positive response rate to these survey statements is between 80% and 95%, which indicates students' and parents' enthusiastic support.

The principal has increased the number of AIS staff to best align resources for the growing population of English language learners. The staff developed 'the WHEELS way to be' which outlines student expectations, including a trust component, to ensure that students have someone to rely on including teachers and their peers. The guidance counselor directs an attendance outreach group. The message center follows up which contributes to the 95% attendance rate.

**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 well developed.**

The administration team conducts frequent formal and informal observations. They provide feedback on the learning environment, student assessments and comment on mutually agreed best practices. Teachers meet weekly after school to discuss

diagnostics and analyze student work, but expressed the need to dedicate more planning time during the school day and institutionalize inter-visitation scheduling. The principal understands the need for greater teacher collaboration during the school day and is actively researching effective and creative scheduling for next year.

The mentor teacher supports staff and has a pivotal role in developing the agenda for the five-week summer institute. In summer many teachers participate in a week-long Outward Bound institute in Oregon. Teachers are enthusiastic about this opportunity to network with expeditionary learning schools. The WHEELS shared teacher practice handbook outlines expected and consistent routines for all classrooms. Crew leaders, student-led conferences, and input from classroom teachers contribute to shared expectations and practice. The school aligns capacity to goals. For example, in response to the growing population of English language learners, Spanish lessons at various levels are provided for all teachers.

The school maintains extensive partnerships with Expeditionary Learning, New York City Outward Bound center and many other organizations. In particular the school curricular structure and professional development is supported by New York Presbyterian Hospital, Alianza Dominicana, Lang Youth After School Program, Teach for America, and Credit Where Credit Is Due provides a financial literacy curriculum and manages students' college savings accounts.

**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 well developed.**

The administrative team meets monthly to ascertain progress toward measurable standards-based learning targets. Summative and formative assessments are further analyzed relative to the school's power and individual learning targets at weekly faculty meetings. The mentor teacher works with teachers one-on-one and conducts teacher assessments with measurable goals at the beginning, middle and end of the year. The principal has taken significant steps to make the Santa Cruz Teaching Standards more explicit with staff. More definition of teachers' individualized learning goals is necessary for the Santa Cruz model to become systemic. The school uses data to measure success, make timely adjustments to school goals and work plans, all which contribute to significant student progress. Additional professional development for staff is necessary to build capacity to use Acuity and Performance Series to drive the process of individual progress monitoring and, where necessary, to make timely modifications to individual student plans.

School leaders rely on two years of data to drive the next stage of goal setting and planning for improvement. The first high school grade enters in fall 2008 and the school is working on the grade 6-12 scope and sequence along with a year-long progress monitoring effort to link assessments to learning targets. The principal and staff recognize and embrace the challenge posed by the growth to high school grades. Many teachers will loop with students in an effort to counter the complex effects of expansion. The administration and faculty, along with the parent community, remain committed to institutionalize current best practices to assimilate new high school teachers, students and curriculum.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning 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.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	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.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	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.

To what extent does the school . . .	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>