

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Harlem Renaissance High School

High School 285

**22 East 128 Street
New York
NY 10035**

Principal: Mary Rice Boothe

Dates of review: May 19 and May 21, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Geri Taylor-Brown

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Harlem Renaissance High School is a transfer high school with 208 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 61% Black, 37% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% American Indian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 1% special education students. Boys account for 41% of the students enrolled and girls account for 59%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 62.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 49% eligibility. The school is part of the Diploma Plus network of schools.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Harlem Renaissance High School is a place where students say they are fortunate to “get a second chance.” Parents and students consider themselves lucky to be a part of this nurturing environment that provides the academic and personal support required for many students to make a fresh start. This clear focus is led by the principal who gently encourages all stakeholders to provide an unwavering commitment to educate the whole child. Her calm demeanor is the right match in this school culture where students say they are parentally nudged by staff members to continue learning and succeeding as they progress towards graduation and college enrollment.

School leaders implement sound practices as the staff work collectively to carefully examine a wide array of student data including student transcripts. The staff couple this information with the school’s diagnostic testing results to ensure appropriate student placement. Some teachers provide differentiated instruction and do well in setting goals with their students. However, the benefits of this good practice are somewhat thwarted by the lack of consistency in offering differentiated instruction and some deficiencies in setting student learning goals. As a result, the inconsistency of interventions negatively affects accelerated student learning, empowerment and the ownership of their learning. Additionally, teachers are not yet fully empowered over their own learning as the school struggles to bring clear linkages between teacher growth and student growth.

The school offers a State-aligned curriculum that includes classes in the arts and closely connects with strong internships and partnerships offered by on-site community-based organizations. An excellent addition to the school is the childcare services they provide for students through the Living for the Young Family through Education Program (LYFE). Parenting students stated that not “having to worry” about babysitting services motivates them to attend school more regularly.

The principal is creative in her use of fiscal resources. She provides material and assigns staff where needed to ensure proper support for all students. However, the school has not yet used these resources to establish a structure which provides a forum for all stakeholders to make regular contributions to the development of the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal leads the staff in clearly focusing on the mission of high school graduation and college attendance for all students.
- The school collects a wide array of data on each student including information that helps staff identify school-wide trends and develop classes, which meet students' academic needs.
- Students and their parents admire and appreciate the school's leaders and faculty who are truly nurturing of every child and who constantly reinforce the drive to learn and succeed.
- The curriculum offerings are varied and include art, music and internships, which help students make connections between school, work and the real world, and accelerate their accumulation of credits towards graduation.
- The school leaders use their budget, grants and additional resources to make effective organizational decisions that provide enriched learning experiences for students.
- The school has excellent partnerships with multiple community-based organizations, which provide personal support to students and offer them opportunities to enhance their learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that lessons are based on individualized student data and that instruction is appropriately differentiated to meet all students' learning needs.
- Establish systems for collaborative development of school improvement that are fully inclusive of all stakeholders.
- Extend student goal setting practices in core subjects to include clearly identifiable incremental next learning steps that are understood by teachers, students and their families.
- Align teacher professional growth with student data to enable teachers to see clearly the linkages between teacher development and improved student achievement.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Staff members at the Harlem Renaissance High School do a good job reviewing student grades every 12 weeks. Teachers share this information with each other and with students for joint monitoring of individual student progress towards graduation. This good system of data examination enables school leaders and teachers to keep a watchful eye on those students who are not making progress. Where required, implementation of appropriate interventions helps students succeed.

This effective system of collecting, analyzing and using data has improved the school's graduation rate. Of the current senior class of 53 students, 40 are slated to graduate this year which is within the required four-year span of time. A concerted effort among staff to focus on three sub-groups, including the graduating class, greatly influenced this positive result. The school did very well in implementing specific strategies focusing on academic and behavioral improvements. Additionally, both graduating students and teachers correlated the improved graduation rate with improved students' attendance.

This good work is part of the school's overall efforts in collecting a wide array of student data which sometimes includes researching and tracking multiple student transcripts from different schools. The school supplements this information with diagnostic exams in English language arts, math, science and social studies to ensure correct student placement in classes. The school must sometimes be creative in this venture and offer multi-level course offerings in the same class. One English teacher spoke excitedly about her creative grouping of grade 11 and grade 12 students who are in the same class period.

A school response to the previous Quality Review is focusing on partnering with parents and improving student attendance. Some headway has been made in including parents in discussions about working collaboratively to keep their children focused on attending school and completing the required work. However, while there is an improvement in attendance with the graduating class, overall student attendance is still extremely low. The current usage of daily wake-up calls, emails about absentees to their parents, and weekend home visits show promise of making a positive impact on student attendance.

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.

School leaders hold high expectations for all stakeholders. A thorough examination of varied student information informs the development of school-wide goals. The administration provides staff with academic and attendance data, as well as behavior data from the Online Occurrence Reporting system (OORS). Additionally, the school looks at which community-based organizations are serving students. Staff members use this information as a springboard for productive discussions during their tri-annual retreats. The clear school-wide foci developed from last years’ retreats are increased graduation rate, accelerated credit accumulation, improved student attendance and educating the whole child.

While development of school goals involved staff members, parents were not an integral part of this process. The school uses multiple ways to provide parents with information about students’ progress. This includes the distribution of progress reports every six weeks and a monthly opportunity to speak with any staff member during “Parents’ Wednesday Afternoon Check-in” However, parental involvement to help develop and monitor school goals does not occur currently.

To encourage student ownership over their learning goals, each student receives a credit tracking sheet at the onset of enrollment. Students assess their progress towards graduation at the end of each trimester so they are aware of what classes are needed to graduate. While helpful for tracking, this process has not proven successful in helping students’ realize and understand the incremental academic learning targets they must attain to reach their larger trimester goals. Students do stay keenly focused on the long term goal of high school graduation. For example, every single student is fully cognizant of their “expected date of graduation”. Staff members engage students in informal conversations which reference this goal. The college advisor sponsors college campus visits which also serve as tangible reminders of the school’s high expectation for every child.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school offers a standards-based curriculum in all core subjects. The school uses the Diploma Plus Competencies as an additional guide to ensure alignment with State standards. In addition, some classes feature multi-level curriculum offerings based upon students’ needs for credit accumulation. For example, students who failed a Regents exam but passed the course are grouped in a science class with those who have yet to take the exam. The teacher has two lesson plans, one to introduce curriculum and one that provides a review lesson. While using this design is challenging, a beneficial result is interactive learning amongst students as they naturally help each other which facilitates and accelerates student learning. The school also offers classes in the arts and recently began offering independent study courses to provide more opportunities for students to gain credits quickly. These offerings and other strategic designs, such as offering trimesters, are a benefit of sound financial planning by the principal. The

trimester design provides students with the opportunity to gain credits more quickly. Additionally, the school leaders secured a grant to purchase Smart boards for nearly every classroom which teachers use to facilitate more student engagement in learning.

Coursework which provides linkages to real world experiences engage students and motivate them to stay the course until graduation. One student spoke passionately about a math class simulation enabling him to set up a checking account, rent an apartment and pay real-world bills. He stated, "These are the kinds of activities that encourage us."

Both students and parents are truly appreciative of the opportunity the school offers in giving them "a second chance" to graduate from high school. "This place is a blessing," was stated by one parent and echoed by several others. Each parent testimony spoke to the "tough love" that their children receive in the school. Students had similar testimonies that attest to the warmth, nurturing and support they receive at the school. They praised the principal for her patience and persistence, "Miss Mary is the reason I came back to school. She shows that she cares."

While the environment is supportive and coursework is rigorous, not all teachers offer individualized work well-matched to students' needs. Some teachers are skilled in differentiating lessons, but this practice is not consistent. Where differentiation occurs, students are fully engaged and learning is evident in classroom conversation and in students' written work. Students readily stated that "some teachers challenge your mind".

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school-wide professional development plan is based on the school's goals for student success. The staff-selected professional development theme for this year, Open Space Technology, has vastly increased usage of technology in classroom lessons. Smart board and computer usage are regular daily occurrences in nearly every classroom enabling students to choose to work independently or in groups. Teacher ownership of their professional growth begins with a written plan, "My Renaissance Plan", and includes a mid-year reflection and an end-of-year evaluation. In addition, teachers receive feedback from both informal and formal observation reports that guide them in developing solid instructional skills. To sharpen their skills, teachers meet weekly and work in concert with instructional coaches who guide their implementation of newly learned teaching strategies. While teacher professional development experiences are full, they lack the depth of connecting directly with meeting students' learning needs. This void contributes to the inconsistent and limited delivery of differentiated instruction.

The inquiry team works diligently on the school goal of educating the whole child. Last year's work on close examination of student credit accumulation informed organizational decisions in the area of student programming for the current school year including the formation of senior class advisory. This intervention is closely correlated with the current increased senior class attendance and the increased graduation rate. The inquiry team also developed the R2 Room. Students who have had an extended absence from school are required to attend two periods daily in this recovery room, where they are provided with the opportunity to make up missed credits and receive counseling services for personal support. Students spoke positively about the R2 Room.

Overall youth development services are very strong. The school's ample support services staff are supplemented by additional staff members from their closely connected community-based organizations (CBO) which offer support to families and provide enhanced learning experiences for students. The New York City Mission Society through their "Learning to Work" program provides students who are passing their courses with paid internships. CBO counselors work cooperatively with employers to help students develop healthy and productive work ethics. Diploma Plus specializes in offering academic and organizational support to alternative high school students. Students are appreciative to have the opportunity to speak with "a lot of people" if they have issues or concerns.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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.

The principal has a clear vision of continued school growth that is shared by all stakeholders. One student stated, "If you want to graduate just a little bit, they can make you want to graduate a lot!" This has been the full focus of every student, staff member and parent attached to the school, and is evidenced by the regular examination of a wide range of student data. This is used to point school leaders in the direction of making suitable adjustments to ensure proper servicing of student needs. For example, the R2 Room was a mid-year intervention to help keep students on track academically while assuring that they had support in facing personal issues. The establishment of tri-annual checkpoints provides students with an opportunity to accumulate expediently credits towards graduation.

School leaders provide staff with multiple sources of data to ensure the provision of varied instructional plans to support student success. Regular school learning walks provide a good picture of the direct impact of teaching and give administrators firsthand information to provide teachers with guidance for continued skills improvement.

There is a clear message at the school that continued student success is the mission. The upcoming tri-annual retreat serves as a year-end reflection and evaluation of the present year's programs. School leaders and staff are well focused on their commitment to educate the whole child and plan to offer additional opportunities for students to succeed. As one parent stated, "They are teaching my child how to go through the maze of life."

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Harlem Renaissance High School	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			X	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?			X	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?		X		
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYQ, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X				
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X					
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X				
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X				
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X				
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X				
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X				
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X				
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed