



**Department of  
Education**

*Joel I. Klein, Chancellor*

**Quality Review Report  
Office of Accountability  
2008-2009**

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**Mother Hale Academy**

**Elementary School 065**

**677 East 141 Street  
Bronx  
NY 10454**

**Principal: Tashon McKeithan**

**Dates of review: February 4 - 6, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Ronald Feinstein**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Mother Hale Academy is an elementary school with 504 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 33% Black and 66% Hispanic students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 89.6%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 92% eligibility.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.**

Mother Hale Academy focuses on providing a supportive and nurturing environment. Inclusion of valuable programs and partnerships illustrates the school's commitment to the social and emotional growth of its students. On any morning, the sounds of a vibrant steel drum band permeate the upper floors of the school. An effective performing arts component is being developed through a partnership with Music and the Brain. Dance is an addition this year through the Arts Connection.

While these noteworthy opportunities are life enhancing and affirmative, the principal and her cabinet understand that an equally weighted focus on academics will serve to move the school more quickly and most importantly to the shared vision and recommendations made since the last Quality Review. There is now a shared understanding of the urgency of developing closer monitoring strategies of student outcomes as well as teacher practices. The school understands the challenges ahead and is committed to improve the learning opportunities of its students by evaluating progress towards its goals more rigorously and taking appropriate action to remedy any shortfalls.

School-wide procedures for data collection and analysis, for setting goals and communicating these to students and families are inconsistent. A monthly calendar communicates the work current in each grade, but it is unclear how the school records and communicates regular interim progress for every student in all content areas. These practices are not explicit for all teachers and, consequently, most students cannot articulate their learning goals. Documented progress and goals in portfolios is uneven. The math and academic intervention specialist teams provide the most effective models for the collection and action on data.

Students are enthusiastic and engaged. The school has begun this year to focus on small-group instruction to facilitate differentiation, which is currently a work in progress. Teachers and administrators work collaboratively and are confident that collective effort supports the academic and personal growth of the school community.

The two Inquiry Teams have made important discoveries about the learning challenges of students they are studying and have communicated these school-wide. The original team focuses on the decoding progress of fourth grade special education students. The second team focuses on a mixed group of fourth and fifth graders who struggle with writing organization. The team has developed a rubric for listening and note taking that is now used school-wide.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school has strong partnerships with a number of external organizations, especially in the arts that enhance the learning and personal growth for all students.
- A youth development curriculum is an integral component of the school's philosophy, supporting students' social and emotional growth and enabling them to experience school as purposeful and supportive.
- The principal, assistant principal, along with the academic intervention specialist/data specialist and two math coaches, collaboratively implement a clear vision that is building capacity effectively.
- The work of two Inquiry Teams has established a firm foundation for meeting the needs of the students they study strategically.
- The school provides a wide range of opportunities for promoting teachers' professional development and personal growth.

### What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all staff follows agreed procedures for assessing work and setting goals for student learning in reading, writing, science and social studies.
- Embed in school-wide practice the identification of next-step learning goals with students so that they can articulate them more clearly and know how to improve.
- Expand differentiated instruction so that teachers consider carefully the needs of all students in their classes when planning and teaching.
- Analyze data more rigorously to identify trends in student achievement by gender, grade and ability, and between content areas to target all students' learning more effectively.
- Identify measurable interim checkpoints to evaluate whether the school is on track to reach its goals and to inform consequent adjustments to curriculum and instruction that improve student progress.

## 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 underdeveloped with proficient features.**

While the school uses a range of data to analyze student performance, this analysis is not rigorous enough to identify trends in student achievement by gender, grade and ability, and between content areas to enable staff to target all students' learning more effectively.

Portfolios housed in each classroom include student work, checklists, end-of-unit assessments, predictive and State summative data where appropriate. However, there is inconsistency even within classrooms regarding the works selected in each content area, with math and literacy the strongest. Following an analysis of student responses in State tests, the school found that students struggle with writing. As a result, it has developed strategies that are helping students to structure their ideas more effectively through improvements in note taking. The Inquiry Team has led this work and developed a useful rubric that is now used school-wide, although it is too early to gauge the impact of this initiative.

Through detailed analysis of the latest Progress Report, the school identified some sub-groups that were not making progress. Subsequently, the school is now tracking the progress of English language learners, special education students and higher achieving students who showed negative gains. The State items skills analysis identified struggling and accelerated students who now attend intensive after-school intervention in math. The school does not yet analyze the progress of boys and girls closely enough to evaluate whether instructional approaches serve different learning styles.

Parents acknowledge and welcome the useful suggestions and strategies the calendars provide for supporting their children at home. Some portfolios contain individual learning goals. While this practice is strongest in math and literacy, it is not yet consistent within individual classrooms and consequently much less so across grades.

**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 underdeveloped with proficient features.**

Teachers meet with students to review and set goals specifically in math, English language arts and music. They have started to develop goals in science and social studies where post-it notes on students' writing identify comments about each student's work and next steps. Most students do not yet sign off on their individual goals. Instead, goals focus on grade level goals for the unit. This component is not consistent in all grades and systems to follow up on recommendations to students are not apparent.

Grade level meetings in September focus on identifying goals that become components of the Comprehensive Educational Plan and the principal's performance review. These goals focus primarily on what teachers will do, not on student outcomes. This year's plan focuses on increased parent involvement, a response, in part, to views expressed in the Learning Environment Survey that called for improvement in school climate, and increased efforts for all students to meet grade level standards. Grade level goals for English language arts and math are collaboratively written by the principal and team leaders along with coaches and assistant principal and then distributed to teachers. In English language arts, math and music benchmark sheets and checklists provide teachers with the precise levels that students should attain at certain points in the year. This year the school began to involve students more in self-assessment. The process is more visible in the early grades, but is not yet effective school-wide.

An informative monthly letter, sent to families, shares grade level goals for each content area. Parents value these community calendars as they show what skills their children are working on at each grade, and contain strategies to help learners at home. Teachers check if students have met grade level goals at the end of each month, keeping parents informed of their children's progress. Teachers prepare materials for vacation packets, classroom work targets and identify specific areas for improvement to assist each student. However, students are not often able to articulate clearly what their goals or next learning steps are. This limits the school in its ability to convey precisely what is expected of each student.

**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.**

A youth development curriculum is an integral component of the school's philosophy, supporting students' social and emotional growth and enabling them to experience school as purposeful and supportive. This benefits many students and engages them in learning. The principal expects flexibility in each of the core subjects to meet the needs of the lowest and highest achievers. This is evident in the most effective classrooms where an engaging curriculum, higher order questioning, posted teaching points, visible schedule and flow of the day result in high quality work. In the least effective classrooms, management and pacing remain challenges. This year, lesson planning emphasizes small group instruction to encourage differentiation, with work matched to students' achievements and aptitudes. While the school is clear about what constitutes good differentiation, inconsistencies remain across classrooms.

Coaches collate and disaggregate summative data electronically and make instructional decisions in collaboration with the principal and lead team to develop a strategic plan for professional development. Performance Series data is used effectively to target small group work for students identified for academic intervention, which has resulted in a reduction in the numbers of students achieving at the lowest level. Curriculum initiatives introduced this year in response to data analysis show student gains on a writing rubric developed by the Inquiry Team. The introduction of pacing calendars better support the reading curriculum in the most struggling classrooms, but not diverse academic levels.

The school sustains various performing and visual arts partnerships, which are available to all students, despite budget cuts. A beneficial alliance with Bank Street supports science planning, leading to improvements in teaching and improved results on the State

science assessment. Data is used effectively to organize the extended day classes in math. The math team analyzed the item skills analysis to identify each group's curriculum content starting point, and weekly assessments to monitor progress and provide information for regrouping and changes in emphasis. Staff work with students in enrichment, grade and remedial groups re-organized by assessed needs in cycles. Saturday classes and small group interventions for guided reading supplement the math program. Enrichment groups are served outside the classroom during guided reading to give classroom teachers focused time with struggling students.

**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 administration regularly conducts formal and informal classroom observations. Data collected by coaches assist teachers in designing a plan of interventions and identifies specific teaching strategies for individual teachers to work on. In September, teachers completed a personal needs assessment, which helps administrators develop individual and school-wide professional development plans. Peer observations focus on the classroom environment and student engagement. In addition, monthly reports on reading and writing create a focus for a professional development plan.

The two Inquiry Teams led by the data specialist and coaches share their expertise across the school. Their work has led directly to improved conditions for learning: which content is taught, how it is taught, when, and sometimes, if it has been taught. This process identifies professional development needs, resulting in more strategic teaching for math and English language arts. The monthly articulation meeting provides an additional opportunity to monitor progress and navigate the taught curriculum more effectively. Special education students achieve well and consistently due to the focused efforts of the Inquiry Team and academic intervention service providers. Despite these efforts, none of the school's identified sub groups have made enough gains to warrant the school extra credit on the Progress Report.

Teachers are encouraged to visit classrooms formally and informally, and to visit other schools to observe effective practices. The kindergarten teachers have completed a cycle of inter-visitations and upper grade teachers are now scheduled for a visit focused on rigor to a neighboring school. All new teachers are assigned a mentor, a staff developer and a grade leader. This year teachers in the lower grades developed individual professional development plans modeled on the Santa Cruz continuum.

The school has established several effective partnerships with outside agencies to accelerate the academic and social growth of its students. The school collaborates with Bank Street's Partnership for Emotionally Responsive Practice and Power Brain Education. As a direct result of this intervention and others, the school has seen a decrease in the number of bullying incidents and a decrease in suspensions over the previous three years. A vibrant visual and performing arts program provides all students with life enhancing opportunities. All students attend the arts studio and upper graders participate in Steel Band, while lower grades regularly attend keyboard and dance classes. Students were especially enthusiastic about participating in Steel Band and modern dance. One student remarked that even though our conference was taking place during her dance period, she was glad to participate in the conversation since these programs "have really changed my life".

**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 underdeveloped with proficient features.**

School leaders and faculty meet regularly in teams that enable the sharing of information. School leaders and faculty meet every two weeks, including coaches and academic intervention services, to track student progress. Monthly reports indicate which students are, or are not, making adequate progress. The school has made productive use of the Acuity predictive assessments and a well-conceived analysis found them aligned to outcomes on a mock English language arts State assessment. Common preps allow teachers to meet weekly with assistant principals, support providers and instructional coaches. Daily preps are frequently used for informal collaborative planning. Coaches harvest classroom data from teachers regularly, collate it and then communicate trends to school leaders. Subsequently, teachers and coaches develop targeted teaching strategies. This practice is strongest in math and less well established in literacy.

The school has designed a process that is intended to inform organizational and instructional decisions based on student performance and identified trends. Teachers are expected to collect student work regularly along with end-of-unit assessments at monthly intervals. Coaches have adapted these assessments to better align to State indicators, target students' needs and better understand what students do and do not understand. In spite of all this work, the school is insufficiently organized for effort. There is significant inconsistency between classes in assessing, goal setting and measuring the impact of instructional practice on student achievement and progress. For example, in one class random samples of student portfolios yielded some with goals for literacy, and none for math, science or social studies. The next portfolio chosen had math, but no literacy, and the next contained science and social studies but no evidence of math or literacy.

The principal uses data from classroom observations and inter-visitations to modify teachers' plans for professional development as well as school-wide initiatives. The cabinet, teachers and parents share the principal's vision that "education is about human potential". While school dialogue is teacher centered, energies are now concentrated on assisting students to take ownership of their learning.

The school's focus on self-esteem, the arts and personal development has provided a firm foundation for improving academic achievement. The school is clear about the continued challenges ahead and committed to improving the learning opportunities of its young people. The principal and cabinet understand the urgency of developing better monitoring and evaluation strategies focused on student outcomes as well as the instructional practices of teachers if the vision is to be realized.

# School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: Mother Hale Academy</b>	△	➤	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>		X		
<b>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.</b>				
<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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		X		
<b>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.</b>				
<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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X				
<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X				
<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X					
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>