

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

Dr. Gladstone H. Atwell Middle School

Middle School 061

**400 Empire Boulevard
Brooklyn
NY 11225**

Principal: Sandra Taylor

Dates of review: March 8 - 9, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Deena Abu-Lughod

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Dr. Gladstone H. Atwell Middle School has 1162 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 91% Black, 8% Hispanic, 1% White and Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 92%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The school has a strong culture of high expectations for students sustained by a stable faculty who are committed to personal professional growth and improvement of pedagogy. These two characteristics have resulted in steady improvements in student outcomes. Students are highly engaged in consistently well-planned lessons that challenge them at all levels in all academies, and particularly in the specialized Britou-Moore Academy, which deserves its strong reputation. There is an expansive array of partners that provide numerous extracurricular activities, including music, dance, jewelry making, business and community service projects, and multiple opportunities for academic reinforcement and acceleration to enrich student experiences. Teachers are skillful at interpreting data for identifying student needs and differentiating instruction. Although there is not a consistent use of rubrics to provide feedback to enhance students' writing progress, there are consistent procedures for developing goals, creating action plans, and monitoring student progress with individual students and at the classroom level. Systems for aggregating information by subgroup, class, and grade to analyze trends for school-level decisions related to staffing, curriculum and instruction are less efficient. Weekly planning time for grade-level teams was established this current year to enhance collaboration, and teachers use their time well to focus on improving student outcomes. This happens both through the scrutiny of individual cases and increasingly, in an inquiry approach where teachers share accountability for a group of students. However, not all teams have adopted this approach and the leadership has not clarified its expectations of teacher teams. Nevertheless, teachers are devoted to collaborating to improve practice, and voluntarily lead frequent morning sessions and participate in a number of university-associated research teams.

The new principal is building on pre-existing positive practices by: continuing to provide each new student with a home computer, creating opportunities to involve parents and students more actively in school decisions, and consolidating procedures to ensure students and teachers carefully monitor assessment results. Resources are aligned to maximize the time students devote to academics while ensuring regular meetings for teachers to plan instruction and align curricula across the grade. An evaluation of existing strengths preceded the formulation of a three-year plan. Timelines or articulated interim benchmarks to help it monitor progress towards its performance goals are not established. This hinders the school's ability to identify when it needs to reinforce instruction for Level 3 students, who represent the majority, many of whom did not attain as high scores within Level 3 in 2009 as they had in 2008. Similarly, the absence of benchmarks in the areas of assessment and professional development limits the potential effectiveness of the school's ability to evaluate its improvement.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students are highly engaged in well-planned lessons that generate active participation and high-level thinking.
 - Teachers use learning-style surveys and data to plan instruction. Lessons regularly use tiered activities to challenge students at different levels, ask students to apply skills, and allow students choice in projects that match their interests. Students show high levels of engagement and participate actively in flexible groups, which accelerate their progress.
 - The highest-performing students are particularly well challenged in the gifted and talented academy, where proficiency rate gains significantly exceeded those of students in other academies. Many of these students take accelerated classes that culminate in Regents exams.
- Teachers use skills data from State tests and periodic assessments to develop goals and action plans with students, and adjust instruction to meet their needs.
 - Teachers analyze skills data and student work to understand each student's strengths and areas for growth to develop goals and plans of action for each student and class. Their analysis provides the basis for flexible groupings and differentiation, and through team meetings, they evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.
 - Students set goals and receive targeted support in their areas of need during class and in extended time, and chart their growth between assessments on a uniform "progress-at-a-glance" graph. This differentiated process sets students on their own paths towards mastery.
- Professional development is a priority, and faculty members share their expertise to embed positive instructional practices that continually improve student outcomes.
 - The school has a long-standing tradition of voluntary professional development. Two mornings each week, faculty and administrators present their best practices or turnkey what they have learned in external trainings. The monthly calendars and attendance reveal rich and varied opportunities that respond to needs identified in teacher surveys and through classroom observations. As a result, teachers feel well supported in developing their craft and valued as professionals, and best practices extend throughout the school.
- School leaders have envisioned and enacted plans to build upon strengths to sustain improvements in all aspects of the school.
 - In assuming leadership, the principal conducted a comprehensive review of data sources with staff to identify needs and outline a three-year plan to phase in improvements. This resulted in additional youth development support for sixth graders to help them adapt to the culture of the school. Effective external partnerships have been further extended to provide

very enriching opportunities in music, dance, technology, and community service.

- The school is proactive about communicating its high expectations to parents and students and engaging them in decisions so that all constituents are committed to sustained school improvement.
 - Between marking periods, the school sends parents progress reports with comments from each teacher on the students' academic performance, participation, and behavior. This allows parents to partner with the school to support the students' individualized learning plans. An additional night of parent-teacher conferences increases opportunities to exchange information. Incentives for students with high absenteeism, such as Broadway plays, have increased overall school attendance by one percent.
 - Parents embrace the new "tea parties" where they can convey their most pressing concerns directly to the principal. This has resulted in the programming of new workshops that are responsive to their needs and opportunities to influence the development of new policies, such as those related to homework and grading.
- Programming of teacher and student time enables the school to support the learning needs of adults and students to advance the school's goals.
 - Weekly assemblies on youth-related concerns support students' social and emotional growth while creating time for their teachers to meet. Grade-level teams use this time well to examine student work and assessment results to plan for instruction. To accelerate learning, particular groups of students attend double-period classes in their area of need.
 - Daily advisory time ensures each student is well known by a teacher who serves as the student's liaison. This time is used for community building and for administering common assessments to insure maximum use of instructional time in the academic core subjects.

What the school needs to improve

- Enhance data systems to disaggregate data by subgroup, class, and grade to identify trends in student progress for more effective planning and evaluation of instructional and organizational decisions.
 - The school analyzes performance level data by subgroup, class, and grade to measure the annual increase in students at proficiency. It does not analyze individual student gains available in the progress report or ARIS, or aggregate those gains by subgroups. As a result, the school cannot reliably measure the impact of its decisions, and misses some trends, such as English language learners who remain at the same level on the New York State English as a second language assessment test over multiple years.
 - Teachers are adept at using data to differentiate instruction and identify students for additional supports. The school lacks a system to aggregate

information up from the classroom level to identify patterns across grades and subgroups. This hinders administrators from using this rich source of information to corroborate classroom observations and evaluate more rigorously the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction.

- Set measurable, reliable interim benchmarks for school-level goals that are differentiated by subgroup to actively and accurately monitor progress.
 - The school's goal of a 5 percent increase in the number of students at proficiency is the same for all grades and subgroups. The school does not specify the outcomes it expects at different points in the year to know whether it is on target to make this goal. The confusion of Acuity tiers with performance levels results in the school underestimating the number of students who are not surpassing their prior year level.
 - Grading policies vary across subjects, and test results account for less than half the value. Thus, the school's use of marking period grades to monitor progress does not always reflect student mastery of the State standards. This is a particular concern in areas such as science and social studies, where proficiency levels are well below those obtained in math and English language arts.
- Formalize structures for teacher collaboration, using an inquiry approach, so that professional development is purposeful and aligned to the school's goals to maximize the impact of efforts and investments.
 - There is a strong culture of professional learning and collaboration. However, the practice of inquiry is still developing, and efforts are not yet organized to promote collective accountability around groups of students and connect analysis to changes within the classroom. The leadership has not clarified expectations for these teams to maximize impact.
 - There are multiple opportunities for teachers to build on each other's expertise. However, the school does not formally engage teachers in using professional teaching standards or other criteria to set differentiated professional goals. As a result, there is no explicit connection between the teachers' own interests to their next steps, as determined by the administration based on their observations and analysis of student outcomes, or to the school's goals. This diminishes the school's capacity to evaluate the impact of professional development on classroom instruction.
- Refine the use of writing rubrics so they are used consistently to provide meaningful feedback and enhance student independence in learning.
 - Despite public displays of rubrics, only some teachers use them effectively to support student success on complex writing tasks. In many cases, rubrics are incomplete, feedback is general, and next steps are not explicit. As a result, many students are unclear about how to process information from different sources, or use skills like paraphrasing, and cannot articulate what they are doing to improve their written work.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

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|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| School name: Dr. Gladstone H. Atwell Middle School | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
| Overall QR Score | | | X | |
| Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions. | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
| 1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards? | | | X | |
| 1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products? | | | | X |
| 1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs? | | | | X |
| 1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults? | | | X | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 1 | | | X | |
| Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time. | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school ...</i> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
| 2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level? | | | X | |
| 2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level? | | | X | |
| 2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends? | | X | | |
| 2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes? | | | X | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 2 | | | X | |

| Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning. | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|---|---|---|------------|---|----------------|
| <i>To what extent does the school ...</i> | △ | ▶ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community? | | | X | | | | |
| 3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support? | | | X | | | | |
| 3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level? | | X | | | | | |
| 3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community? | | | X | | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 3 | | | X | | | | |
| Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs. | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i> | △ | ▶ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers? | | | X | | | | |
| 4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning? | | X | | | | | |
| 4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes? | | | | X | | | |
| 4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals 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 progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning. | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i> | △ | ▶ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school? | | X | | | | | |
| 5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school? | | X | | | | | |
| 5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time? | | X | | | | | |
| 5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies? | | X | | | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 5 | | X | | | | | |
| Quality Review Scoring Key | | | | | | | |
| △ | Underdeveloped | ▶ | Underdeveloped with Proficient Features | ✓ | Proficient | + | Well Developed |