

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**The Fort Hamilton School
Elementary – Middle School 104
9115 5th Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 112209**

Principal: Marie J. DiBella

**Dates of review: February 2 - 3, 2010
Lead Reviewer: Karina Costantino**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Fort Hamilton School is an elementary-middle school with 1,307 students from kindergarten through grade eight. The school population comprises 6% Black, 23% Hispanic, 55% White, and 16% Asian students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 94%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The school's motto "we are family" best describes the warm, strongly supportive tone throughout the entire building. Exemplary leadership empowers teachers, parents and students to play an active role in improving student outcomes. The teachers reach out to parents throughout the year and involve them in activities that make them a part of the school community. However, there are inconsistencies in the process by which staff communicate school, grade and class information to parents, which the school is seeking to address through a more sophisticated webpage.

The administration applies itself seriously to improving the school, modeling exemplary practice to the entire school community and ensuring that everyone focuses on achieving the highest school and student goals. Distributive leadership structures are embedded and, as a result, teachers use every opportunity to share practice and ideas throughout the building. Vast arrays of formal and informal assessments give staff detailed information about the impact of interventions and enable them to adjust plans throughout the year. The principal's vision is clear and supports a cohesive educational focus from kindergarten through grade 8. Pacing guides and instructional calendars support a rigorous standards based curriculum, which includes progress-monitoring checkpoints. This enables the principal to make organizational adjustments that improve the impact of instruction, raise expectations and promote student achievement.

Teachers provide every student, from kindergarten through grade 8, with activities in each lesson that match to their ability and interest level. This practice creates an optimum learning environment to improve student performance although, on occasions, teachers questioning does not provide sufficient challenge to enable all students to make the best possible progress. Classrooms are interactive and highly engage students in learning through the strategic use of a variety of materials, which align well with students' academic level and their learning modality. The school has a highly successful after-school program, but for financial reasons fewer students can participate than would like to do so. The school is considering ways in which to extend this program into the normal school day so that more students can benefit.

Students are actively involved in every aspect of school life and freely articulate high praise for the leadership and teachers. They take pride in directing their own learning, being aware not only of their learning goals in English language arts and math, but in the way they learn. This awareness of their learning style effectively allows them to make correct choices in all academic activities.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal creates relationships across the school that are warm, supportive and inclusive so that students, teachers and parents feel valued, take pride in the community and actively support student achievement.
 - Students are actively interested in their learning and freely articulate their goals. They also understand how they learn, empowering them to maximize their learning. Staff members consistently give students and families feedback and indicate to them next steps, which strengthens parents being active participants in their children's' education. The students indicate the staff is kind and supportive and they are never afraid to ask questions. This risk-free environment allows them to direct their own learning at their own pace.
 - The principal and her cabinet carefully look at all data and assessments to discuss their findings with the staff each month as it relates to student progress. In addition, the school provides additional support to improve the conditions of learning where the data indicates trends of concern. This practice ensures timely intervention, where needed.
- The rigorous standards -based curriculum, supported well by pacing guides and instructional calendars which include progress checkpoints enables staff to monitor student progress towards well defined goals and adjust their teaching accordingly.
 - Teachers develop curriculum maps for English language arts and math on each grade level. These maps link directly to State standards in English language arts, math, social studies, and science using an interdisciplinary approach. All teachers identify learning outcomes that relate to the curriculum maps, and review and revise their instructional approaches according to whether students achieve these outcomes.
 - Teachers meet regularly with the principal and assistant principal to monitor student progress and adjust curriculum where needed. As a result, the school addresses student individual needs on a consistent basis throughout the year.
- Teachers work collaboratively and passionately in teams to share good practice and develop tools to analyze data successfully and plan curriculum and instruction that effectively supports student learning.
 - Teacher teams use an inquiry approach throughout each grade and content area. They are adept at using a variety of data sources such as learning outcome progress sheets, ARIS, periodic assessments and conference notes, as formative assessments to monitor student progress toward meeting their goals and identifying trends to monitor and adjust curriculum.

- Teachers within grade teams discuss their findings from grade inquiry meetings with each other. For example, following their discussions and using the evidence they assembled, they made decisions to change the eighth grade math program to a pre-algebra program to better prepare the students for high school.
- The school maintains a supportive learning environment that consistently conveys high expectations to students and families and promotes active involvement in the school community.
 - The school informs parents in writing monthly on a goal progress sheet if their child is far below meeting the standards. The school then requires parents to review and sign the sheets in preparation for meeting with their child's teachers. This process is a valuable tool for improving the ways that parents and students can meet the school's high expectations.
 - The parent coordinator conducts workshops throughout the year to make sure families understand the ARIS Parent Link, which supports their learning and offers many opportunities for parents to become involved in their child's education.
- Staff profits from varied opportunities to share information about trends in student progress while developing strengths as individuals and members of teacher team.
 - Teachers share content expertise throughout the building at instructional team meetings, chats with the principal each month, faculty conferences, and weekly bulletin tips. This practice builds leadership capacity among the staff.
 - Because of their evaluation of trends in students' progress, teachers in grades 1-6 and departmental teachers in grades 7 and 8 create exams that model the format found on the English language arts state exam. This helps to develop students' test sophistication skills, as well as students' knowledge of content area and improves students' exam performance school-wide.
- The principal has established very effective systems for school self-evaluation, review and modification of practice with a clear focus on improving student learning.
 - School leaders and faculty introduce successful, research-based programs, which align with the Comprehensive Educational Plan to improve the academic performance of key subgroups. For example, the school uses a special program for their English language learners which allows students, as well as staff, to continually monitor their progress towards their academic goals for June outcomes.
 - Leadership assigns case managers to students in need of support as the Pupil Personnel Committee and teacher identifies them. The case manager evaluates the effectiveness of supports the team recommends, making adjustments throughout the year to improve student learning.
- As a result of a careful monitoring of curriculum through teacher teams, curriculum is engaging and rigorous, providing all students with high levels of engagement in their learning modality.

- All teachers present the curriculum in mini lessons, utilizing the use of visual and auditory support in the form of pictures, tables, graphics music and video clips. Extensive use is also made of SMART boards as an interactive tool. Students engage in various learning stations and centers, as well as independent studies. This multi-sensory approach supports all learners.
- All teacher teams use their analysis of student work and diagnostic assessments to adjust curriculum mapping effectively. As a result of the trends they see, they discuss with the students not only what their next steps are, but also the most effective way they learn. This empowers students to direct their own learning to improve academic outcomes.

What the school needs to improve

- Give more students access to popular project based programs that are currently only available to limited numbers of students after school.
 - The school offers Lego robotics and drama afterschool throughout the school year on Friday afternoons but the number of students is restricted by budget constraints. The school recognizes that it is not reaching enough students and is considering ways to extend it into the daytime program.
- Improve the consistency and quality of the exchange of information with families.
 - Although many classrooms have interactive websites and teachers communicate with parents through e-mail on a weekly basis, this is not consistent throughout the building. The school recognizes the need to update their school webpage, which will provide all parents with essential information at the same time.
- Improve teachers' use of questioning to challenge and support all students to reach their potential.
 - All teachers receive professional development in the art of higher order questioning techniques. However, this is not consistent throughout each classroom for all sub-groups, which prevents some students from performing to their highest potential.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Fort Hamilton School	△	▷	✓	+
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>	△	▷	✓	+
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>	△	▷	✓	+
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