

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

Meyer Levin School

Middle School 285

**5909 Beverley Road
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Frederick Underwood

Dates of review: May 10 - 11, 2010

Lead Review: Beverly A. Wilkins

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Meyer Levin School for the Performing Arts is a middle school with 993 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 95% Black, 4% Hispanic, less than 1% White, and less than 1 % Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 4% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 93.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The entire school community exudes confidence in the noticeable change in physical and organizational aspects of school life. In his second year, the school leader has effectively revitalized the use of space to celebrate the artistic talents and to address the diverse interests of the student body. By offering instruction in three academies, the principal's vision drives collaborative teacher teams that function as distinct professional learning communities. Conversely, a one-school philosophy brings academy leaders and colleagues together frequently to interrogate school, grade, class and subgroup summative and formative data in order to improve achievement school-wide. This whole school commitment results in professional activities that promote cohesive classroom practices that enable pedagogical continuity and teacher expertise. The school has extremely good systems for inclusive decision-making. Therefore, effective monitoring of student learning results in changes to teaching that increases student progress and proficiency across the school. However, there is a lack of consistency in terms of application of differentiated approaches to instruction among all faculty members.

The performing arts program is the hallmark of the school's core curriculum. Countless enrichment activities to promote the students' artistic, social, emotional, and academic growth offered through the school and community partner organizations engage personal interests and capacity. Steel band, drama, dance, journalism, graphic design, instrumental and choral music, visual arts, health, cooking, yoga, and crochet complement challenging courses that provide enrichment for high achieving students as well as intervention services for students in need of additional support. External relationships with partners, such as A Better Chance and Oliver Scholarships, enhance the school's instructional focus on whole child development. As one grade 8 student stated, "This school helps you as an individual and pays attention to your needs." However, there is not yet an embedded school-wide system to ensure that all students set and self-monitor their progress towards their own goals. The school's academic intervention teams ensure that the school's growing special education and English language learner populations are receiving appropriate assistance. Nevertheless, a gap in programming adversely affects the school's alignment of curriculum with mandated learning standards.

Parents organize activities, encouraging families to participate in school events. They appreciate partnerships the school develops that ensure academic success and social growth. Parents state the school is welcoming and they are satisfied with the frequency of the information received via email, school messenger, letter, or website. However, most parents are not fully aware of the precise next steps required for their children to improve academic outcomes.

What the school does well

- The school collaborates very successfully with community-based organizations to integrate youth development services that support and accelerate students' academic and personal growth.
 - The school's commitment to whole-child development engages students, families, and teachers in on-site collaborative work with Inter-Borough Development and Consultation Center. This expert counsel and guidance enables suitably high-level services that result in decreases in the number of referrals for special education services. Due to the consistency of meetings between support service providers and valuable teacher input, diagnosis of social and academic needs of targeted students lead to precise interventions.
 - The school also looks outwards to enrich its curriculum and to meet specific student needs. Its well-established partnerships with The Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation provides students with sensitive mentoring support that addresses individual needs and promotes positive social, emotional, and academic development. Thus, the most vulnerable students move into least restrictive classes or environments.
- The principal makes positive organizational decisions that facilitate school-wide improvement toward greater increases in academic outcomes.
 - Thoughtful and innovative organizational decisions and allocation of staff have led to encouraging developments school-wide. These well-reasoned changes result in the school's restructure into three small learning communities. Accordingly, a sense of ownership within each academy produces detailed information on students' achievement in each subject area that is used to assess movement toward instructional goals. Hence, across academies, teachers and student leaders focus on instructional issues to promote improved achievement.
 - Assistant principals and coaches conduct weekly teacher meetings to facilitate collaborative discussion about instructional and curriculum goals. This structure leads to content area planning that clearly aligns to the school's efforts toward accelerated learning. For example, workshops on looking at student work to guide instruction forge consistency of practice across content areas, grade levels, and academies. Frequent teacher meetings afford opportunities for groups of practitioners to create growth plans for diverse groups of students. One teacher commented, "Collaboration is the heart of the work."
- Teacher teams engage in a collaborative and systematic process to investigate the efficacy of instructional strategies in order to advance achievement.
 - Drawing on the school's best practice, interdisciplinary teams focus on 10 low performing students within each academy. Inquiry drives in-depth focus on individual student outcomes in order to establish clear connections between summative, formative, and class-based assessments. Protocols used for looking at student work center on teaching and learning for positive impact on accelerated and individualized planning. The school's focus on representative groups of students sparks identification of "problem areas". This work becomes the impetus for adjustments to curriculum and instructional decisions school-wide.
 - The implementation of the My Five Program improves student achievement through sharing of assignments, assessments, and inter-visitations. Through a collaborative

model, each teacher adopts a subgroup of five students in the lowest third of their class. As teachers instruct their own students, students further along the learning continuum benefit from instructional strategies that enhance overall student performance.

- School leaders and faculty gather a range of relevant data to understand individual student, subgroup, and whole school learning needs to advance their progress.
 - Teachers' effective analysis of data translates into thoughtful actions that take into account recurring patterns in learning. Examination of yearly performance trends, revealed through a collaborative study of Acuity and instructionally targeted assessments, results in modifications to classroom lessons that improve student engagement, including extending students' time-on-task. This scaffold produces a rise in proficiency levels in all subject areas.
 - The use of multiple-data sources to determine areas of strength among students is an entrenched practice of teacher teams throughout the school. Ongoing school leader-to-teacher and teacher-to-teacher planning sessions facilitate rich discussions, which in turn, lead to highly individualized student instructional support for remedy or accelerated learning. Students report that teachers help them as individuals and pay attention to their needs.
- The school provides extensive individualized professional development in support of a professional community that implements effective teaching methods.
 - Professional development conducted in multiple forums helps teachers learn from one another. Teachers' participate in "chat and chew", "lunch and learn", and department meetings to support one another and share best practices. New and inexperienced teachers, matched to a mentor or critical friend, receive collegial input that fosters improved teaching techniques in order to meet high performance standards for both students and teachers.
 - The principal and school leaders observe teaching regularly and give clear evaluative feedback on strengths and areas to develop. Low- inference narratives and benchmark goals underpin improvement in teaching and learning; whereby integration of its instructional focus on Principles of Learning enrich student-centered environments.
- The cabinet works cohesively to assess progress and make necessary revisions that guide the school forward and improve student outcomes.
 - School leaders and teachers meet once per week to track student progress in core subject areas. Therefore, teachers take ownership for moving groups of students toward targeted department goals. Consequently, adjustments made to curriculum maps encompass findings as to how well students perform at benchmark levels. Implementation of practice tests that familiarize students with content and format of standardized assessments in science and social studies coupled with greater instructional emphasis on constructed responses in English language arts have positive impact on student performance and stimulate whole school long-term planning to meet learning needs.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure coherence and alignment in the school's core curriculum with State and City learning standards in order to provide mandated instruction in consonance with a comprehensive education.

- School leaders and faculty develop engaging curricula aligned to State and City standards, including rich and expansive arts programs, which guide carefully crafted curriculum maps in core subject areas for a majority of their students. However, the absence of the social studies curriculum on grade 6 impedes student learning and participation in a relevant content area. The lack of an embedded instructional focus in a key academic area creates incoherence in the delivery of standard based teaching; therefore, not all students have access to fundamental knowledge critical to reducing the achievement gap.
- Initiate a school-wide approach to help students track progress and set goals based on benchmark data to leverage change in proficiency.
 - The school develops short-term goals and benchmarks in order to monitor progress. Consequently, teachers track progress and trends consistently to set goals for individual students and groups of students. Nonetheless, active student involvement in goal setting that anchors self-monitoring of progress is uneven across the school.
 - End-of-unit tests, quizzes, and student work provide the data necessary to track student progress to set learning goals. This results in evidence of a small majority of students knowing what they need to work on to progress in particular classes. Therefore, students describe how well they are progressing in very general terms with no mention of what they need to do next to make further progress.
- Further consistency in differentiated instruction based on data so that lesson planning reflects purposeful groupings, challenging assignments, and tasks accommodate different learning styles to maximize student outcomes.
 - Teachers engage in talk about best ways to teach different groups of students. Consequently, teachers are able to articulate the individual needs of students. However, systemically, the design of lessons and work products do not reflect or address the specific needs of each subgroup of students. Thus, students' preferred learning styles are not a consistent applied element when teachers plan for different student needs.
 - The school trains and supports teachers' use of tiered instructional practices to differentiate instruction for students. Nevertheless, the implementation of this methodology of instruction and provisions for rigorous coursework to promote higher-order thinking skills are yet not firmly in place.
- Provide useful information to students and families with realistic, actionable feedback that fosters greater understanding of learning needs and next steps for improvement for their active participation in the educative process.
 - Through a wide range of workshops, conducted by the parent coordinator and other leaders, parents receive information about school programs and offerings that they can use in support of their children. Currently, ARIS Parent Link is available; parents receive report cards and interim progress reports to monitor their children's performance. However, these tools do not give purposeful recommendations for next steps in order to improve student performance. Accordingly, it is rare for students to articulate strategies for reaching improved performance.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Meyer Levin 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