

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

The Essence School

Middle School 311

**590 Sheffield Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11207**

Principal: Claudy Makelele

Dates of review: March 15 - 16, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Michelle Fratti

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Essence School is a middle school with 247 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 81% Black, 17% Hispanic, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the 2008-2009 school year was 93.5%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Despite the unexpected retirement of the founding principal over the summer, the school community smoothly transitioned under the leadership of a new principal who arrived at the start of this school year. The principal immediately sought input from staff, students, and parents to gain a comprehensive perspective of the school's strengths and areas of need. The principal and assistant principal have established effective systems for school self-evaluation, review and modification of practice. These have had a positive impact on student learning. This is a learning community built upon mutual trust and collaboration, and focused on improved outcomes for students.

The principal makes strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet the needs of students. Student and staff programs were precisely adjusted to provide sound, targeted small-group academic intervention that is accelerating student progress. Teachers effectively meet for common planning periods each month. Although only introduced at the start of the school year, these have already become embedded practice for teacher teams. Teams use multiple forms of data to set and monitor differentiated goals for students on the lowest third and special education students. This positions the school well to expand these systems to other subgroups, including students in the top third, which are currently not included. Although individual teachers and teacher teams monitor student progress and levels of performance, not all teacher responses to student work reflect guiding comments and next steps in learning.

Inquiry work has increased from one team last year, to include all staff on grade-specific inquiry teams this year. All staff actively participate in the inquiry process every Monday after school. Their work effectively targets groups of students who are in the lowest third in reading and math on State tests. While there is already good evidence of adjustments to the curriculum and instruction to increase student performance, this work is new and not yet well established enough to determine its effectiveness over a full school year.

Under the excellent leadership of the new principal, the school has made rapid and significant progress in enabling all staff to use a wide range of data for goal setting, action planning, collaborative inquiry, and to monitor students' progress. Not all teachers differentiate students' learning sufficiently to meet individual needs, and the school recognizes the need to embed the differentiation of instruction across all grade levels and content areas. A shared vision towards achieving common goals to best meet the needs of students is driving the school forward.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The new principal and staff use a wide range of data to provide a complete picture of students' progress across all aspects of the school that informs instruction.
 - The school administers baseline assessments, collects and analyzes a wide variety of data, including ARIS, student portfolios and teacher assessments to identify trends in student performance. Using this data, the school engages in measurable goal setting in literacy and math for students in the lowest third, and for special education students.
 - All staff now have data binders and track both individual and sub-group progress towards meeting school goals, using both interim and daily classroom assessments. During the grade 7 meeting, teachers reviewed the results of the latest Acuity assessment in literacy. They identified a group of students who were not making progress and brainstormed strategies involving cause and effect and sequencing to re-engage these students.
- Guided by student performance data, the principal makes informed and effective organizational decisions to support improvements in student learning.
 - The wise use of school's budget and thoughtful scheduling allows for the purposeful adjustment of student programs to include one period weekly for each grade to regroup for targeted small-group instruction, based upon identified student needs. The scheduling of all support staff at this time reduces the student teacher ratio and provides effective academic intervention services. After-school tutorials and Saturday school complement the school day interventions.
 - The school creates regular times during the school week for grade-level teacher teams to meet to support the instructional goals and best address the needs of students. For example, the grade 6 team review current data, look at student work and collaborate with the coach to create exemplar literacy lesson plans that are used by all grade 6 teachers.
- The principal and assistant principal use a wide range of data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of organizational decisions, interventions, and professional development support.
 - Last year, the school decided to add the Writing and Reading Assessment Profile to their assessment tools to evaluate progress towards interim and long-term goals. Coaches and external consultants provided professional development that has enabled staff to utilize this tool to inform instruction. As a result, adjustments to curriculum maps and pacing calendars are consistently used by all staff for ongoing improvement of instruction to meet the needs of students.
 - The grade 7 team analyzed the results of their September science assessment and determined that a majority of students had not yet

mastered interpreting graphs. The math and science staff revisited their pacing calendars, and co-planned lessons for the month of October to address this need. As a result, students have demonstrated increased mastery of this skill.

- Individual students and groups with identified needs benefit from targeted, caring support that is well matched to their academic and emotional needs, both during and after the school day.
 - During one small-group academic intervention class, six targeted students worked with the literacy coach on mastering strategies presented in their English language arts class to improve their ability to write a constructed response. Each student could articulate one strategy, such as “I need to underline supporting facts” or, “I need to start by restating the question.” Students read their written responses, and the group successfully utilized a rubric to edit each other’s work and identify steps to improve the responses of two students.
 - During team meetings, teachers review data and collaboratively select reading and writing strategies that are evidenced in lessons in all subjects for students in the lowest third and special education students. All staff now teach writing across the curriculum. Student portfolios in each subject contain extended writing tasks evaluated by rubrics
- All staff benefit from participating in professional collaborations that foster reflection as well as providing opportunities for researching effective instructional techniques that improve teacher practice.
 - The grade 7 inquiry team used ARIS data to identify a target group of students in the lowest third in literacy and math. They discussed the progress in each subject for one student in particular. The math teacher shared a successful strategy to engage the student and the social studies teacher shared the name of a partner who helped keep this student on task. As a result, they all agreed to utilize these techniques and follow up in two weeks to assess the impact on learning.
 - Through the effective use of the school-based option, all teachers are engaged in a structured collaboration on teams using an inquiry approach. During a grade 6 meeting, they compared the performance of two students in their target group on the recently administered Developmental Reading Assessment 2 to the results of an earlier administration. For one student, they focused on changes in comprehension and evidence that the student was successfully using selected instructional strategies. The meeting concluded with recommended adjustments to the intervention plan and next steps.
- Through her positive leadership, the new principal has created a learning community that focuses on student outcomes with a vision to continue to accelerate student learning.
 - The principal defines school goals through an extensive array of data. During teacher team meetings and the school’s leadership team meetings, there is discussion and ongoing evaluation of these goals. At weekly team meetings, teachers continually review data, adjust

curriculum maps, revise lesson plans, and identify clear next steps. As a result, there is an increase in student outcomes.

- The principal and assistant principal effectively involve and communicate with the school community during school-level planning process and have fostered a broad base of support for the school's direction. At all faculty conferences, grade meetings and parent association meetings, the newest data from the interim assessments as well as student work are shared resulting in the formation of next steps.

What the school needs to improve

- Include the progress of all students in the analysis of student data to accelerate student learning, especially for the upper third.
 - One school goal states that 85% of the lowest third will achieve one year or more growth in English language arts proficiency as indicated in the progress report. While teacher teams closely monitor the progress of these students, and interim and classroom assessments indicate that this subgroup is making adequate progress, the school has not yet set measurable goals for students in the top third. As a result, the number of students achieving Level 4 has decreased over the past three years.
- Promote greater consistency of differentiated instruction based upon student data so that lesson planning reflects purposeful grouping, and questioning extends thinking to maximize learning for all students.
 - The school utilizes data to establish groups based upon performance or skill, and teachers differentiate instruction in a majority of classes. Many teachers ask questions that promote critical thinking and accountable talk. However, these practices are not yet embedded in all subjects or in all grades. As a result, students, especially those in the top third, often do not receive sufficient challenge or appropriate extensions to address their individual learning needs.
- Provide consistent feedback to students, with detailed reasons for their success and clear next steps for improvement, to help them set and achieve their goals.
 - All staff use rubrics to evaluate student work and note performance levels. However, not all consistently give detailed next steps on student's written work that are aligned with the performance criteria. This prevents some students from developing the ability to monitor their own progress.
- Refine goal-setting protocols in all subjects for all subgroups to actively monitor their progress in order to reinforce ownership and accountability, and ensure that learning is accelerated for all students.
 - The school uses multiple forms of data to set goals, develop action plans, and track the progress for students in the bottom third and special education students. However, this rigorous system has not yet been expanded to include goal setting and progress tracking for students in the top third. As a result, this subgroup is not making adequate yearly progress in English language arts and math as evidenced by the most recent progress report.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Essence 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