

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

High School 647

**985 Rockaway Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11212**

Principal: Meri Yallowitz

Dates of review: January 6 - 7, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Richard D'Auria

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Metropolitan Diploma Plus is a transfer school with 160 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 85% Black, 14% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 73.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School opened in September 2008 to serve over-age, under-credited students between 16 and 20 years old. It has a rolling admissions policy accepting students who are 16 years of age or older throughout the year. The school effectively fulfills a community need to serve over-age and under-credited students. Toward that end, a cohesive team has evolved as an effective, collaborative, and collegial staff, sharing a common vision to ensure a second chance of success for the students. A trimester calendar enables accelerated credit accumulation that motivates students to continue with their education. Diploma Plus supports a rigorous, academically oriented process-model with a philosophy that failure is not an option. Teachers model for students how to apply learning strategies during college-related coursework. The synergistic effect of a range of highly effective partnerships accelerates the school's progress toward meeting the needs of its students. Teachers are acutely perceptive of potential issues leading to the prompt referral of students to an advocate counselor in order to resolve issues well before they escalate.

Teachers are becoming increasingly familiar with differentiated methodologies, such as providing students with options in lessons or by grouping students based on learning styles. However, they do not yet use data to flexibly group students in order to address strategically those areas where students lack proficiency in specific skills.

Parents have noticed the transformational impact that the school is having on their children. One father candidly shared, "The concern they have here is overwhelming to me. Within a year, I'm getting another child with no more negative attitude and body language". However, leadership and parents both acknowledge the need to get more parents actively engaged in the educational lives of their children and the school community.

The school has a number of good tools to establish, monitor and adjust student-learning goals. However, individual student learning goals are currently broad and not sufficiently specific. There are several excellent examples of instructional bulletin boards illustrating evaluated student work for reference in the hallways. However, classroom environments do not currently include rubric evaluated student work with feedback as an instructional tool. Teachers benefit from multiple opportunities to engage in meaningful professional development activities where they have opportunities to facilitate discussion and engage in distributed leadership. However, adult learning does not currently focus upon student work products and their assessment. Leadership continually monitors student performance outcomes and uses a variety of structures and processes to evaluate teacher professional collaboration and instructional practices, and dynamically make adjustments to increase coherence.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders, faculty, and partners work together well as a collaborative community with a coherent vision and goals to nurture student learning.
 - The school's team develops, monitors, and adjusts clearly articulated and well-understood school-wide goals. These include the delivery of a rigorous and coherent curriculum, a unified pedagogical approach based upon common beliefs, and the use of data to drive instruction and improve Regents results. A cohesive approach enables the school to function well as it moves toward fulfilling each of these goals.
 - Teachers and students carefully monitor progress toward reaching interim goals by using several strategies and tools. Weekly "Focus Fridays" enable students to reflect upon their progress toward established goals. They also use a Diploma Plus student success meter to enable them to visually gauge progress. These tools enable close monitoring and adjustment of practices.
- School leaders and teachers collect, analyze, and discuss a wide variety of performance data and share strategies that guide their planning and practice.
 - Administration and teachers effectively use an array of student performance data. The school uses uniform periodic Acuity assessments as well as teacher developed benchmark assessments that they administer every three weeks. Teachers then discuss the results during common planning time and are able to utilize the data thoughtfully to guide and inform lesson planning. They then provide individualized support to students and this contributes toward student success and credit accumulation.
 - Teachers benefit from the effective support of a number of outside consultants who guide them in their organization and analysis of data. Classroom monitoring, ongoing support during common planning and modeling all facilitate their development of student conferencing skills, and the administration and interpretation of formative assessments to inform their instructional practice and for reflection.
- Seamless partnerships with community-based organizations provide academic and youth development supports to ensure student success.
 - Diploma Plus, a non-profit organization, and CAMBA, a community-based organization, together provide seamless academic and youth development supports and resources. Students meet four times weekly in an advisory class with teachers and advocate counselors. A student shared, "Advisory helps me to organize, prepare for college, handle stress, and discuss life issues." Student internships effectively provide meaningful, real-world work experience. CAMBA's primary point person model provides advocate counselors that effectively support resolution of issues and student success.
 - The school strategically joined the Curriculum Learning Support Organization in its second year. This is because it provides professional development

support and a network of like-minded schools and principals who value the community component of effective student learning and success.

- The school has made some highly effective organizational decisions aligned closely to school goals that motivate students to continue learning and progress.
 - The school's trimester calendar provides students with opportunities for accelerated learning and credit accumulation that positively motivates them toward continual future achievement. Students may demonstrate proficiency and earn up to seventeen credits per year. The accelerated rate of progress, particularly for students frustrated by a prior lack of success in a more traditional school, enables them to see the "light at the end of the tunnel".
 - The efficient use of time, balanced with a rigorous and engaging curriculum, intrinsically motivates students toward high school graduation and beyond. One student said, "I had a history of cutting. I didn't know I'd get this far. Now, I want to be a nurse." Students excitedly shared the number of credits they have earned while at the school in contrast to a history of failure elsewhere and their plans include a variety of colleges across the country.
- Teachers have developed curriculum maps and units of study aligned with State standards and Diploma Plus competencies that support coherence and rigor in learning.
 - The curriculum is engaging and student-centered. The curriculum maps provide a progressive development within each subject area following an understanding by design approach that begins with graduation and what it will take to achieve it. Unit plans accompany the maps and are color coded by subject and prominently displayed in classrooms with essential questions.
 - A portfolio system captures and demonstrates student mastery. As students get close to fulfilling diploma requirements, they develop a rigorous senior portfolio that they present to a committee. The portfolio includes a resume, college applications and essays, selected work and student reflections.
- Multiple professional learning communities, inquiry teams and teacher-facilitated study groups support effective professional growth and distributed leadership.
 - There are many quality opportunities for the faculty to collaborate, share, and meaningfully plan together. Two professional learning communities effectively focus upon subject related teaching strategies. Two inquiry teams engage in deep action research with target populations of struggling learners, where members implement teaching strategies and evaluate their effectiveness. Teachers facilitate weekly whole faculty study groups, thus providing opportunities for distributed leadership and a voice in decisions.
 - The "school-wide adoption project" enables teachers to "adopt" three target population students as part of their inquiry work. Testing the efficacy of strategies provides teachers with invaluable insights and a deeper understanding of how to address learning challenges more effectively.

What the school needs to improve

- Support all teachers in developing consistent use of a wider variety of data-driven

and targeted differentiated instructional strategies, to ensure that they meet the needs of all groups of students.

- While teachers provide students with options during the “do now” portion of lessons or group students by learning styles, they do not yet routinely group students based upon assessments of skill strengths and areas in need of development. Instruction is therefore neither as strategic nor targeted as it could be. Teachers do not make full use of the available data to group students flexibly and provide them with challenges matched to their skill level.
- Teachers extend the length of the mini-lesson to no good purpose and, consequently, do not spend the allocated time on planned activities. This limits the chance to provide more opportunities for multiple points of entry into the lesson and more actively engage the students in their own learning.
- Refine the process whereby students establish their own learning goals to ensure alignment with recent formative assessment data to guide more focused instruction.
 - Teachers do not yet use benchmark assessment data to inform student goal setting. As a result, goals are general and broad rather than specific and focused upon improving skill proficiency.
 - Current goals typically include “improve my attendance” “stay on track” “complete all of my anchor assignments” and “earn more credits”. There is not yet a refined focus on skill specific goals such as the ability to infer from text in English language arts or the ability to isolate a variable in math.
- Implement a variety of strategies to engage more parents and guardians as actively involved partners in the educational lives of their children.
 - While the school employs a rigorous intake process and makes a concerted effort to reach out to parents to resolve issues and address concerns in a variety of ways, the current level of active parental participation is limited. Only nine percent of parents responded to the Learning Environment Survey, well below the citywide average of 45 percent. Only ten or so parents attend parent association meetings, thereby limiting the ability of most parents to take an active part in school decision making and to understand how the school’s high expectations affect their child.
 - School leadership and a core of active parents acknowledge that many parents experienced past frustration when their children were unsuccessful in more traditional schools. They have not yet reconnected into the different culture of this school in order to better support their children.
- Focus professional development upon the assessment of student work using standards-based rubrics and critical feedback to inform next learning steps.
 - Current assessment practices lack consistency in the evaluation of student work. Professional development does not currently focus upon student work products. Posted work does not provide critical feedback using a rubric to inform students of their next learning steps.
 - The few pieces of currently posted student work contain brief teacher remarks such as “excellent” or “very good” rather than next steps toward improving overall quality with illustrated revision processes.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Metropolitan Diploma Plus High 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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed