

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

The William McKinley School

Elementary School 063

**121 East 3 Street
New York
NY 10009**

Principal: Darlene Despeignes

Dates of review: October 28 – 29, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The William McKinley School is an elementary school with 199 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 17% Black, 65% Hispanic, 7% White, and 10% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 28% special education students. Boys account for 64% of the students enrolled and girls account for 36%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 91.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The William McKinley School is an intimate, supportive place of learning for students. Parents and teachers express deep appreciation for and pride in this school, which they refer to as “The Hidden Gem of the Lower East Side”. It welcomes students and families from all backgrounds. The school has confronted a number of problems in recent years, including declining student enrollment, designation by the State as “persistently dangerous”, and poor student results on State exams. However, a dynamic, new school leader, reinvigorated faculty and sensible steps taken have improved significantly the climate and student achievement within the school. In her third year, the principal is driven to raise academic and behavioral standards and does so by modeling effective data-infused decision making and engaging herself as a lifelong learner.

Substantial investment in professional development supports all teachers engaging in grade-level inquiry teams. Teachers collaborate productively and enthusiastically by analyzing a broad range of student data and sharing instructional practices. Monthly data meetings with the principal reinforce the inquiry work, as teachers track achievement and learning progress of students, classes and subgroups across four major content areas. This information then leads teachers to modify lessons to some degree, mainly through small groups and leveled questioning, to meet student needs. However, students do not always appear engaged fully in their learning nor does differentiation of instruction, materials and work products occur frequently enough. With limited technology resources in classrooms, not enough rigor in instruction to deepen students’ understanding and few performance-based assessments, there is still work to be done to challenge students further.

The principal is pro-active in identifying trends and addressing issues that affect the school’s future. She has set up systems to review and maximize steps for school improvement. For example, enrollment at the school has shifted in recent years as the number of special education students has tripled and the ratio of boys to girls has increased. Therefore, key priorities have been to strengthen collaborative team teaching classes at every grade level and foster strategic external partnerships to meet the personal needs of all students. Despite these efforts, the academic achievement of special education students in the self-contained environment has stagnated and requires closer monitoring and improvement. Moreover, the school’s identified goals lack measurable guideposts and become difficult to evaluate over time, which limits further goal setting and action planning.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and faculty have nurtured strong external partnerships and a welcoming learning community that is highly supportive of students' personal and academic growth.
 - Parent engagement and satisfaction with the school have risen dramatically over two years, as measured by formal surveys and attendance at school-sponsored events. Strong partnerships with the community-based organizations provide free recess and recreational activities for students, while reinforcing the school's emphasis on students' healthy social and emotional development.
 - In response to being identified last year by New York State as a persistently dangerous school, the principal and staff have redoubled efforts to instill values of responsibility and self-management in students and address minor disciplinary incidents fully before they escalate. Already, parents, teachers and students report significant improvements in culture and tone in the school's daily operation. Similarly, suspension incidents are far lower than the past two years.
- Teachers engage productively in collaborative inquiry and robust professional development that sharpens instruction and raises learning outcomes.
 - All teachers engage in inquiry work through grade-level teams and have an additional preparation period weekly for this work. As a result, there is consistency to the inquiry process, including an emphasis on reviewing student work and sharing instructional resources. Staff receive summary notes from each team that highlight effective protocols for teachers to analyze student data and then adjust unit plans and curriculum maps.
 - Teachers invest fully in shared action research to the point where new resources in professional development are identified to maximize student learning outcomes. The school modified its calendar so that students dismiss early for eight half-days and teachers meet together during this extended professional development time. The principal and teacher experts also host a series of voluntary lunch learning sessions with nearly 100% faculty attendance. The inquiry approach has become the basis for conducting all workshops and classroom observations.
- Coherent organizational decisions provide a consistency to many effective instructional practices, especially to support struggling learners.
 - The school maintains small class sizes and uses the reduced size very effectively to provide extra support to struggling learners. Most teachers plan small group instruction as part of workshop model lessons. They target individual students during conferences and model skill strategies to small groups. There is increasing use of graphic organizers in core subjects to scaffold students' learning.
 - Teachers follow City-mandated core curricula, including the Teacher's College balanced literacy approach and the Everyday Math program. Additionally, part-time coaches assist teachers in developing science and

social studies units of study that align with State standards. Character education lessons and student self-management techniques are well integrated into daily instruction and the operation of the school.

- The school has made solid progress in goal setting and tracking learning and progress by student and by class across four major content areas, which has raised academic standards.
 - Students have individualized learning goals in English language arts, math, social studies and science. Teachers confer with students regularly to work on specific strategies and next steps, and they communicate with families via interim progress reports and a new E-Chalk system of classroom web pages. Teachers organize this important information effectively to identify learning targets.
 - For two years, the school has focused on science and now social studies to raise the rigor and consistency of academic expectations in these core subjects. To that end, teachers have begun to develop rubrics and common assessments in these content areas.
- Staff work effectively to analyze multiple data sources to better inform school-level instructional and organizational decisions.
 - The principal and teachers are strongly committed to using a broad range of student data, including State assessments, subject-specific rubrics, conferring notes, attendance, safety, and behavior information for school-level decision making,. Together, staff identify sensible priorities, especially in interventions and extended-day programs.
 - Data meetings in grade-level inquiry teams result in improved instructional consistency as teachers look together at student achievement data.
- The principal has established effective systems for school self-evaluation and modification of practice to improve student achievement.
 - The principal is highly reflective and relies on cycles of student data to inform decision making. Committees for attendance, school leadership, behavior management and grade-level inquiry teams all meet regularly and purposefully to monitor and improve student achievement.
 - Staff work strategically to improve academic resources for struggling learners. Every grade level now has a collaborative team teaching class and these paired teachers receive extensive training from consultants in parallel teaching and extra time for co-planning. As a result, students in these classes outperformed peers in last year's State tests in progress gains.

What the school needs to improve

- Monitor closely the learning experiences and progress of relevant subgroups of students in order to accelerate student achievement for all students.
 - Instruction in the self-contained special education class does not share the academic rigor of the far more challenging and engaging collaborative team teaching classes. As a result, nearly all of the students in the self-

contained class did not make a year's progress in both English language arts and math last year.

- The pupil personnel team is successfully redirecting its focus from behavioral observations and feedback to more academic links. The team follows a case-study approach, but does not yet take the opportunity to look broadly at student subgroups' academic performance to determine where greater interventions are needed.
- Deepen differentiated teaching practices and design performance assessments to enrich the learning of higher achieving students.
 - Teachers use rubrics and written assessments to a good extent, but few examples of teacher-designed performance assessments are used to evaluate more precisely student learning across content areas.
 - While struggling learners often receive tailored instructional support, the same is not true for higher-performing students. Teachers do not sufficiently differentiate texts and materials or provide meaningful extension activities to challenge these students.
- Enhance the rigor of setting whole-school goals by developing clear interim benchmarks to evaluate progress and modify goals where necessary.
 - School-wide goals are known by major stakeholders and reflect the collaborative efforts of developing the Comprehensive Education Plan. However, the lack of benchmarking of these strategic goals impedes the oversight that occurs during the year to ensure their fruition.
 - While teacher, parent and student leadership are encouraged and developing, there still remains an overdependence on the principal for long-term planning and accountability for progress. For example, teachers will soon take over facilitation of inquiry meetings and student council will soon be formed, but the transition to genuine shared ownership of school goals has not yet fully occurred.
- Expand opportunities for students with different learning styles in order to broaden student engagement.
 - Currently, technology is taught as a distinct enrichment cluster with limited evidence of technology integrated into regular lessons. This separation of technology from core content areas diminishes its potential as a powerful learning tool for students, especially visual learners.
 - When provided with relevant, hands-on activities, students are highly engaged in lessons, such as a grade 4 science lesson where students worked in groups to measure magnet strengths and an English as a second language class where two girls authored and illustrated a storyboard script. Currently, the school lacks sufficient culminating curricular experiences for students to showcase learning in different ways, such as a culture museum, math fair or invention convention.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The William McKinley 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