

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**The Family Academy
Elementary-Middle School 241
240 West 113th Street
New York
NY 10026**

Principal: Diana Diaz

Dates of review: November 18 - 19, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Sara Carvajal

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Family Academy is an elementary-middle school with 232 students from kindergarten through grade 5, and grade 7 through grade 8. The school population comprises 75% Black, 21% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 -2009 was 90.3%. The school shares a building with two charter schools.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The Family Academy is a cozy, nurturing school that focuses on developing the socio-emotional and academic aspects of each child. Parents and faculty repeatedly echo, “Space politics is an issue”, as two charter schools have moved into the school building in recent years. Additionally, the low register of students has imposed tight budgetary constraints on the school, which limit the purchasing power for support staff, such as instructional coaches. Nonetheless, school leadership has made strategic decisions in identifying its school-wide goals and matching these with creative scheduling and the services of key instructional leaders at the site to move forward the school’s achievement agenda. At this time, however, the school does not sufficiently involve parents in school decision-making and other leadership roles. As a result, it does not keep parents fully informed of how they may work at home to support school-wide goals.

The principal has established a new system this year that engages all teachers in reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses during individual consultations at the onset of the year. As a result, each teacher drafts two professional goals that support the principal in defining customized professional development plans. Moving forward, the administrative cabinet has a clear map to revisit the goals throughout the year in conjunction with assorted teacher data, and make adjustments as needed. In contrast, the school has not yet transferred this systematic model for short- and long-term goal setting to the student level. Additionally, although teachers are exploring possible ways to set broad goals for sub-groups within their respective classes, they are not applying their useful grading rubrics to communicate practical next steps with students and their families. Nor do they demonstrate a structure for revisiting and revising goals throughout the school year.

The administrative cabinet focuses on supporting teachers to develop their classroom skills, with a particular emphasis on increasing teachers’ use of student data to plan and teach according to individual students’ needs. In addition to receiving administrative feedback from ongoing observation visits, teachers participate in teacher team meetings where they receive a wide range of student data and instructional suggestions. Still, despite the opportunities to collaborate, teachers do not have ownership of the meetings in a way that empowers them to reflect on their instructional methodology and make connections between their practice and student outcomes. Furthermore, the school does not yet employ a structure for reflecting on the impact of its current professional development opportunities so that it can make meaningful adjustments over time. As a result, the instruction in many classes remains generic with little evidence of tailoring the teaching to suit the different learning needs of students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Leaders make informed and effective organizational decisions that align with school instructional goals and support efforts toward improved student learning.
 - Despite the school's intense budgetary limitations, the principal has creatively scheduled multiple opportunities for teachers to meet, including Lunch and Learns, in order to support increased exposure to data analysis. In addition, an experienced reading teacher, who is adept at tailoring literacy instruction, collaborates weekly in a lab setting with several classroom teachers in the elementary grades. This is so that these teachers gain ongoing, hands-on professional development that supports their growing understanding of differentiated instruction.
- All constituents agree that the school is a safe, nurturing environment where students receive a good level of support in their personal and academic development.
 - Parents unanimously agree that the "straightforward principal has made a huge difference" in consistently addressing student behavioral problems through personal interactions with families. In addition, students are appreciative that they can turn to their teachers and the guidance counselor in order to resolve personal issues and concerns that interfere with their learning. As a result, safety at the school has improved, and students are able to focus more on their academic achievement.
 - The principal has strategically enlisted the collaboration of several community-based organizations, including Friends of the Children, Northside, and Truce. These collaborations have provided much-needed mentoring for students and focused workshops, which provide strategies to teachers and parents in dealing with the socio-emotional issues of students.
- Administrators and teacher leaders work cohesively to analyze a range of data that organizes the school to move forward with achieving improved student outcomes.
 - The administrative team works with teachers to organize assorted streams of data, including ARIS data, student reading levels, authentic writing samples, and end-of-unit test scores. Consequently, they assemble data binders that familiarize everyone with the strengths and shortcomings of individual students. Additionally, the team provides teachers with periodic, color-coded, item skills analysis charts for English language arts and math. These visual aids support administrators in leading ongoing discussions with teacher teams regarding student achievement and deficit trends for subgroups, such as students in temporary housing and the special needs population.
- The school has established consistent structures for monitoring the effectiveness of pedagogy with a clear focus on deepening adult learning in order to improve instructional practices throughout the school.
 - The administrative team is highly visible throughout the site, dedicating the majority of its schedule to visiting classrooms and engaging teachers in a balance of clinical and informal observations. Ongoing oral and written feedback informs teachers of the quality of their work. As a result,

administrators are able to efficiently identify the pedagogical trends throughout the school, provide demonstration lessons accordingly, and plan for future professional development that supports teachers in improving differentiated classroom practice.

- A thoughtful approach to teacher self-assessment, professional goal setting, and self-monitoring is emerging that supports differentiated professional development.
 - The principal has established a check-in system that prompts teachers to set two professional goals at the onset of the school year. During this intimate session, individual teachers meet with the principal to reflect on their self-assessed strengths and areas of need. The principal then uses this information to strategize professional development action plans with the teachers. As a result, the services of the contracted math consultant, the reading lab specialist, and the assistant principals are targeted efficiently. The principal plans to revisit the professional goals with each teacher at mid-year and year's end to gauge progress and adjust their respective action plans. To this end, teachers feel that communication with administration is improving and that the designated professional development is meaningful.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop coherence and rigor of instructional practices through accurate analysis of data across subject areas to ensure that all students make progress via differentiated learning experiences.
 - Grade level teacher teams meet continually with their respective assistant principals to analyze a good range of student data, including summative test scores, interim classroom performance and, at times, anecdotal observations of lower achieving students. However, teachers are not yet consistently utilizing data to plan data-driven, tailored instruction for different target groups of students. In addition, most teachers are not utilizing the data to reflect deeply on the specific impact of their selected instructional resources and teaching practices on student achievement. As a result, the purposeful analysis of data is a void that exists throughout the school.
 - Teachers can articulate well the behavior patterns, learning preferences and general needs of the students in their classes. However, they do not yet utilize this information to gauge the instructional strategies that they should use for different students during lessons. As a result, most teachers present generic lessons, and students manifest very uneven levels of engagement, especially during math, science, and foreign language classes.
- Systematize goal-setting structures to ensure that measurable interim- and long-term instructional goals are set for relevant targeted groups of students, progress monitored, outcomes evaluated, and readjustments made.
 - The school is currently exploring the best way for teachers to set goals for targeted students. To this end, the principal has requested that each teacher identify five students that represent a variety of subgroups in their respective classes and set learning goals for these individuals “as a measure of practice and learning”. At this time, however, the precision of the annual learning goals is very loose as goals are not measurable nor do they provide students with interim next steps. Additionally, beyond the short-term targets used for literacy, the school has not yet clearly defined a benchmark system that supports teachers in gauging student mastery of goals across subject

areas over time. In the absence of scaffolded, focused student goals to serve as the teachers' compass, instruction results in a generic experience in most classrooms.

- Strengthen grading and interim reporting systems throughout the grades so that all students and their families can reflect on guiding comments and levels of performance, monitor progress and follow up on clear next steps.
 - Several teachers are developing rubrics to grade student work in literacy for the elementary grades and humanities projects at the middle school level. However, teachers are not using the rubrics effectively to identify to students the specific areas in which they have done well nor to target focused next steps. Similarly, the school does not communicate the clear outcomes of the rubric grades and next steps to the families of students. As a result, students are unclear of what they need to continue to strengthen as learners, and parents do not know which target areas they should support at home.
- Establish greater consistency with involving parents in school decision-making in order to nurture parents as contributing leaders of the school community.
 - Concerned parents express the view that the parents' association executive board continues to reflect vacancies and, as a result, has not yet established a solid stream of communication with parents at large to encourage their participation in ongoing leadership opportunities at the school.
 - The small core of parent volunteers has not yet assumed a major role in school-wide decision making this school year. Consequently, most parents are vaguely familiar with the school's current goals and are unclear of how they may best support their children's academic achievement at home in alignment with this year's instructional focus.
- Expand the opportunities for faculty to engage in collaborative inquiry work, thereby increasing teacher ownership of key decision-making that influences student learning across the school.
 - Assistant principals, and at times, an outside consultant, lead the highly regimented facilitation of the work of teacher teams, placing teachers in a predominately passive position. These team leaders organize summative and periodic assessment data for teachers, and they continually drive the work of teachers in matching the deficiencies of students with the expectations of annual State math exams. In addition, the consultant takes charge of developing intervention plans for individual students while the assistant principals propose most instructional strategies and resources for teacher use. At this time, the low level of teacher input during teacher team meetings indicates that there are limited opportunities for them to influence inquiry work in a reflective way. As a result, teachers do not yet have a stable forum that enables them to openly discuss and refine their tested theories of action regarding differentiated instruction in the classroom.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Family Academy	△	▷	✓	+
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