

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School

Elementary School 318

**276 West 151 Street
New York
NY 10039**

Principal: Sean Davenport

Dates of review: December 14 – 15, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School is an elementary school with 204 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 94% Black, 5% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes no English language learners and 2% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 94.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower opened its doors five years ago with the current leader as the founding principal of the school. The entire school community exudes a sense of happiness and trust. The respect evident in collaborative team meetings and other staff interaction, is mutually shared between all members of the entire school community. The principal is passionate about the school and his vision is clearly aligned and evident in the effective resources he provides with the sole goal of advancing the achievement level of each student. Strong arts partnerships support the interdisciplinary units of study which result in lessons that engage students. School leaders and faculty note that they have made good gains on the State English language arts and math assessments. However, teaching strategies, while differentiated, do not provide a breadth of study to fully challenge higher achieving students and to accelerate their learning according to their capabilities. Students are not always aware of their short-term goals so they are unable to effectively monitor their own progress.

The principal knows all students individually by name and his knowledge of their family experiences contributes to the safe and supportive climate evident in the school. Parents actively participate on the school leadership team and provide in classroom support. Their efforts are well coordinated with a number of outside organizations which provide after school and tutoring resources. As a result, these combined efforts and supports are integrated and align with school goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students.

School faculty prominently displays samples of students' work with corresponding rubrics. However, the school does not communicate the next learning steps to students in a consistent manner across all grades. School leaders and faculty review data from ARIS, Acuity and classroom developed assessments in order to note trends. The principal schedules individual meetings with teachers to discuss student progress, monitors student groupings and strategically moves teachers in order to maximize their impact on increased student achievement.

While the experienced inquiry team demonstrates good inquiry practices, they are only now beginning the important work of sharing their findings and strategies with other grade level teams and to further cement coherent practices throughout the school. Distributed leadership is evident as lead teachers facilitate inquiry team meetings, write grant applications seeking additional resources and chair various school committees. During cabinet meetings the principal monitors progress in order to maximize opportunities for their leadership growth and development.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal aligns resources well and makes effective organizational decisions across all aspects of the school to support improvements in learning.
 - The principal has established same gender classes in grade 5 in order to reduce distractions amongst peers and focus on the specific learning and social needs of these students. Additionally, unlike other classes in earlier grades, grade 5 faculty teaches specific subjects based on content area matched to individual teacher's expertise and strength. As a result of this new initiative, teachers note improvement in their pedagogic skills, academic growth and a marked decrease in the number of reported incidents at this grade level.
 - The principal's budgeting, coupled with staff inputs, results in strategic use of resources that are well aligned to the school's goals. A newly hired coach provides direct classroom support to teachers and collaborates with the visual arts coordinator. Together, they create interdisciplinary units of study so that key vocabulary is integrated into each unit and students experience specific words in an instructional context that support understanding and usage.
- The school provides a safe, caring environment where adults know individual students well and coordinate supports to positively impact students' academic and social growth.
 - In response to school leaders' review of data, newly created math enrichment after school program engages higher achieving students and stimulates their interest leading to noted gains on formative assessments.
 - Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School is one of ten schools to pilot an "expanded learning time" program. School employees staff it, which enables every student to be well known by school faculty. As a result, students benefit from small group support that assists their social and academic growth.
- School leaders use a variety of tools to organize and analyze data to note trends and make school wide decisions linked to improving student outcomes.
 - The principal effectively uses ARIS to note specific trends in student performance. As a result of the careful analysis and monitoring of attendance data, strategies to improve attendance, including staff making daily phone calls about absentees, are resulting in attendance gains.
 - Faculty members use assessment data from Acuity and end-of-unit assessments in order to review student performance and note gaps in students' learning. As a result of an item analysis of English language arts data, teachers incorporate specific critical thinking skills into interdisciplinary project-based units of study resulting in improved student learning in English language arts.

- The principal and staff view parents as key partners and consistently engage them in school decision making, resulting in a shared commitment to school goals.
 - A broad-based level of support results in the active involvement of parents on the school leadership team. Parents feel valued as partners in the process. A parent member currently volunteers to maintain and enhance the school's website, a vital link in sharing and exchanging information with the school community. This demonstrates commitment to the school, ensuring that school constituents are not only kept abreast of current events but also share the school's goals and expectations.
 - The home-school compact for learning led to the successful creation of a Grandparents' Club. Club members chaperone class trips, support teachers and mentor and coach other parents. The increase in adult-to-student ratio is conducive to optimal levels of personal success.
- The school sustains strong partnerships with parents and various community and cultural organizations that have a positive impact on students' social, emotional and academic development.
 - Focused collaborations with community partners integrate with other school-based supports throughout the school day. These partnerships provide full service supports such as recreational activities as well as health and dental screenings. Consequently, they meet students' social-emotional needs in a cohesive manner that directly assists their academic achievement.
 - Professional development provided by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Guggenheim Museum and Faith Ringgold Anyone Can Fly Foundation support the faculty's development of interdisciplinary units of study. This enables teachers to provide students with varied opportunities such as serving as student exhibition docents and art researchers and, by continually improving the levels of student engagement, contributes to a safe and respectful culture.
- The principal establishes and regularly evaluates leadership opportunities for staff in order to cultivate the development of teacher leaders.
 - At weekly cabinet meetings, stakeholders monitor student progress and make recommendations to mentor and coach individual teachers in order to further support their pedagogical needs. As a result, the skills of new teachers are quickly progressing and are directly impacting on increased student achievement.
 - The principal hosts retreats three times during the school year in order to evaluate the impact of leadership opportunities available to staff, foster collaboration and develop staff morale. The risk free conversations empower teachers and they frequently volunteer to chair committees and assume other leadership roles.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand supportive and challenging differentiated instruction to include lesson planning that better manages groupings and student assignments.
 - While teaching strategies are differentiated, sufficient extensions to challenge higher achieving students so that they are able to apply learning to new situations and further accelerate their own progress is not the norm across all classrooms.
 - While critical thinking strategies are noted some teachers do not yet employ open-ended, higher order questions that lead to increased levels of student engagement. As such, classroom discussions where students challenge and support each other's thinking are not sufficiently evident.
- Provide consistent feedback to students with detailed reasons for their success and clear next steps for improvement based on specific rubrics so that students can set and achieve their goals themselves.
 - Rubrics and process charts are displayed in classrooms. However, some teachers do not consistently use the rubric to explain strengths and next steps so that students can use these tools alongside teacher feedback to improve the quality of their work.
 - Although teachers are using classroom developed assessments and the Accelerated Reader program, to have students assess their own progress, some teachers are only just beginning to help students identify their next learning steps and take responsibility for their learning.
- Refine all goals to ensure they include precise short- and long-term measurable outcomes to monitor students' progress effectively and to reinforce student ownership and accountability.
 - Teachers and students can state measurable long-term goals but not all students know their short-term outcomes so that they can focus their efforts and have greater purpose for their learning.
 - While the English language arts team utilizes assessments to track student progress, they have not yet taken the important step to adjust goals and targets for individual students in order to further accelerate their learning.
- Deepen and expand teachers' understanding of collaborative inquiry in order to influence teacher practice and student outcomes.
 - The work of the experienced school wide collaborative team continues to mirror good inquiry practices around math. These practices are only at the beginning stages of expanding to the grade level team. All teams are not currently well aligned.
 - While teams of teachers analyze student assessment data, resulting in small group instruction, structures to share practices school-wide in order to further expand their teaching skills and develop opportunities for personal growth are not established fully.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower 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