

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

Harbor Heights School

Middle School 349

**306 Fort Washington Avenue
New York
NY 10033**

Principal: Monica Klehr

Dates of review: January 11 - 12, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Martha Madera

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Harbor Heights is a middle school with 158 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 100% Hispanic students. The student body includes 97% English language learners and 7 special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 96.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

After several years in temporary locations Harbor Heights Middle School is now housed on the fourth floor of an elementary school building situated in the heart of the immigrant community it serves. The student population is comprised of English language learners and students coming to the country with interrupted formal education. In order to meet the needs of this diverse group of learners, the school has enlisted the support of all members of the school community. Working together, teachers and administrators ensure that the school climate is one that promotes a safe and orderly environment and communicates high expectations to all students. Parents voice a deep appreciation for the many opportunities the school provides for them to become involved in their child's education. They praise the principal for ensuring that topics covered during the monthly parent association meetings and regularly schedule parent workshops are relevant to their role as parents in the school. To further support the school's efforts, the principal has established successful collaborations with community-based partners in order to promote youth development services and academic growth for its students.

The staff reviews a wide range of summative and formative data in order to identify the school's strengths, trends, and areas of need. Based on data analysis, a school-wide focus on writing was established to ensure that all content area teachers incorporate key writing standards into their teaching repertoire. To monitor the progress students are making, the teachers use data tracker spreadsheets that allow for data to be viewed at a glance facilitating the identification of skills and concepts needing further reinforcement. While a large number of classroom teachers use this tool, it is not a consistent practice across all grades and content areas. This has a negative impact on the school's efforts to ensure that teachers plan lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of student subgroups.

Using an inquiry approach, teachers across the school meet weekly in grade and content area collaborative teams. During these meetings teachers analyze data, review student work, co-plan lessons and share best practices. The focus work of the teams has allowed the math department to closely align curriculum to key standards ensuring that they are taught and students are mastering them. Teachers attest that participation on these teams empowers them through evaluating their effectiveness to make instructional decisions that have a direct impact on their classes and across the entire school curriculum, ensuring cohesiveness as to what is taught across grades and content areas. At present, the delivery of instruction across grades and content areas lacks rigor. As a result, not all learners, particularly those with interrupted formal education, are challenged at the appropriate level.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and faculty effectively communicate high expectations and promote a safe and orderly environment that is conducive to student and adult learning.
 - Students say that they feel safe in their school because teachers and administrators have established clear behavioral expectations that are respected and understood by everyone. High marks are given to the school's advisory program where teachers engage students in conversations that support their social-emotional learning and academic development. Teachers also meet with students on a one-to-one basis during their lunch break, as well as before or after school to assist them with lessons that they did not understand.
 - High expectations around behavior are communicated to students by all staff which leads to student and teacher interactions being based on mutual respect. This is evident as teachers engage students in group work that promotes independent thinking and allows students to clarify their thinking in a relaxed non-judgmental classroom environment. During monthly assembly, students are recognized with medals for academic achievement and attendance.
- A vast majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaboration on teacher teams, using an inquiry approach to examine student work, plan together, and share ideas in order to improve student outcomes.
 - Teacher teams meet regularly to align curriculum with key standards in order to ensure that necessary skills are taught and students demonstrate their understanding. Teams review assessment data and monitor student progress to address skills that need further reinforcement, thereby accelerating progress.
 - All teachers at the school participate in both grade-level and content-area teams. When meeting in their content-area teams, teachers work on strengthening content-area instruction, while grade teams focus on developing a common instructional focus and coherence across the school to ensure students meet the expected standards.
- School leaders and faculty engage students and families in reciprocal and ongoing discussions about their children's progress, expectations, and next learning steps.
 - The school regularly maintains contact with parents to ensure they are kept abreast of their child's academic progress, attendance issues, and discipline concerns. They are appreciative of the principal's open-door policy and highlight the fact that teachers make themselves available to meet with them to address concerns they may have about their children's progress in school and make recommendations for next learning steps.
 - Regularly scheduled monthly parent association meetings and workshops on such topics as the ARIS Parent Link tool provide parents with information that supports them in monitoring their children's progress. To further promote ongoing discussion with families, advisory teachers have identified time in their schedule specifically earmarked for meeting with parents. Each student is well known by their advisor who communicates with parents to do all they can to ensure student academic success.

- The school gathers and analyzes a wide range of relevant data and uses it to identify and develop a deeper understanding of the school's strengths, trends, and areas of need in order to inform instruction and maximize student achievement.
 - The school conducted an initial review and analysis of all summative and formative data and, as a result, identified English writing as an area of focus to be developed and supported across the content areas, in order to maximize student achievement.
 - Teachers meet in teams on a weekly basis to review student work, conference notes, and Periodic Assessments data in order to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and to plan differentiated lessons. The school designed data spreadsheets to organize and view data at a glance, which makes it easier to monitor students' progress and to identify students for targeted intervention.
- The school has effectively developed internal capacity and numerous external partnerships to provide youth development services for students in order to promote their academic and personal growth.
 - The school's strong student advisory program is supported by several external partners who provide relevant youth development services for students. Washington Heights Inwood Coalition and Columbia Presbyterian are two of the many community organizations that support students and families. The school also collaborates with the Northern Improvement Corporation which specializes in addressing the specific needs of immigrant families.
 - Through the Shakespeare Arts program the school provides classroom teachers with professional development opportunities as they work with professional teaching artist to assist students explore Shakespeare's themes and language. Teachers report that participation in this program supports students' social, emotional, and academic growth as they work to develop character and personality traits through improvisations and relationship building.
- The school has structures in place to monitor and evaluate curricular and instructional practices across the school in response to student learning needs.
 - The principal scheduled four school-wide sessions throughout the year where teams analyze the quality of their instructional initiatives in order to reflect on the impact it is having on student outcome. Two of these sessions have already taken place the latest resulting in the adjustment of the school-wide writing rubric in order to refine the area where teachers give feedback to students on their next learning steps.
 - To support, monitor, and evaluate the work of teacher teams, the school adapted a matrix for purposeful and effective teacher teams. Using the matrix, teams identify their goals, which students their work will have an impact on, what is needed to accomplish their goals, and what interim assessment the team will use to evaluate their progress.

What the school needs to improve

- Implement differentiated instruction across all subjects and grades so that students are provided with multiple entry points into the curriculum in order to meet the needs of diverse learners.

- Evidence of differentiated practice is sporadic and inconsistent across the school. In one grade 7 English as a second language class students worked on tasks that match their individual language developmental competencies, while in another students worked on generic assignments, which failed to provide sufficient challenge to meet individual needs.
- Too often students work on the same worksheet, which can result in lack of challenge or the work being too difficult which limits their ability to engage with what they are learning.
- Ensure that the curriculum is rigorous, challenging and engaging for a variety of learners with different needs, in particular English language learners.
 - Because the school identified a need to accelerate the progress of English language learners, the school has started work to increase academic rigor across the curriculum as teacher teams develop thematic units in Spanish language arts that provide a common thread across all content areas.
 - The school believes that English language learners learn best when they are given extra time to process language, content information and have multiple opportunities to communicate what they are thinking. However, teams are just beginning to design lessons incorporating these strategies in order to increase academic rigor and greater student engagement.
- Develop systems to track student progress at the classroom level in order to effectively adjust plans and goals to better support the progress of student subgroups and target individual students.
 - Teachers use data spreadsheets to organize and track student progress and adjust plans and goals for whole class instruction and subgroups. However, teachers do not target individual students, particularly those identified as students with interrupted formal education.
 - Individual teachers have started to design classroom level tools to record students' progress during student conferences and group work in order to better inform their planning when developing lessons for student subgroups and individual students. However, this practice is inconsistent across teachers.
- Ensure that differentiated support for teachers based on their specific developmental needs and content knowledge is provided based on feedback from classroom observations, with specific next steps for improving practice.
 - The professional development plan does not include clear next steps for teachers based on classroom observations in order to facilitate differentiated support for individual teachers as a means to promoting their professional growth.
 - New teachers feel supported through participating in teacher teams and inter-visitations with colleagues. However there is no strategic plan identifying teachers' strengths and areas in need of improvement derived from formal feedback from observations, walkthroughs, and inter-visitations.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Harbor Heights 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