Quality Review Report

2009-2010

Children's Workshop School

Elementary School 361

610 East 12th Street
New York
NY 10009

Principal: Maria Velez-Clarke

Dates of review: February 25 and March 3, 2010
Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Children's Workshop School is an elementary school with 259 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 12% Black, 34% Hispanic, 36% White, and 13% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 92.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

Teachers, students, and parents cherish the Children's Workshop School for its positive and inclusive learning environment. Teachers know and nurture each student's strengths, and they design lessons that promote social activism. To that end, students engage fully in powerful learning experiences, such as the annual "Honoring the Dream" unit and field trips to a farm, food pantry, and tenement house. In addition, the school encourages students to perform the various arts genres and showcase talents publicly. Parents are invited to play a vital role in school planning and decision making, and their support for key initiatives provides additional resources and expertise. This school benefits from a dedicated, passionate leader who advocates for each child and adult and models collaborative learning.

While all stakeholders invest deeply in this school community, there is a need for more formalized structures to set data-based goals and monitor student outcomes. For example, school-wide priorities lack precision and benchmarking to ensure sufficient progress. In addition, curriculum maps need further revisions and detail across all subjects and grades. Staff know students well and challenge them to good extent, but there are stronger, more consistent teaching and assessment practices in English language arts than in other subject areas. Teachers work productively in teams and share resources, including literacy-based rubrics, to improve students' academic writing. Teachers also demonstrate good capacity for differentiating their lessons to meet the needs of different learners, especially struggling students and those with different learning styles. However, they miss many opportunities to provide detailed, useful feedback to students. Moreover, staff do not use technology sufficiently for instructional or organizational purposes and the school struggles with budget shortfalls that limit student grouping possibilities. As a result, students' academic progress outside of English language arts stalls somewhat.

The school offers students rich social, emotional, and academic learning opportunities. With improved tracking of student progress and adjustments to curriculum and instruction, there is great potential for accelerated achievement and growth.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal models and nurtures a positive culture for children, teachers and families that supports the growth of leadership throughout the school.
    - Students learn in mixed grade classes and participate in advisories, purposeful field trips, and other activities that strengthen each student's personal development. For example, older students work as reading buddies or field trip guides with younger students which deepens bonds among all learners and infuses the value of social responsibility.
    - As an extension activity to the school-wide study of Martin Luther King, Jr., upper grade students compete with peers in private schools in a series of book debates. Students defend vigorously their book choices and, in the process, hone their oral presentation skills and persuasive logic. Moreover, the school then purchases books for the library based upon students' thoughtful recommendations and reviews.
- Parent engagement is very strong as families invest deeply as active partners in their children's learning experiences.
    - Parents play a vital role in school planning and decision making. At the start of the year, staff attend a retreat to review student achievement data and set goals, while parents provide their input shortly thereafter in a similar team-building meeting. Examples of their hands-on support include the school library, which was designed and funded by parents, and the recycled paper lunch trays, which parents lobbied for and implemented. The principal and staff assert their commitment to parent partnership by inviting them to Friday community celebrations in which students and classes share their talents, interests, and thoughts publicly. These highly-attended, weekly celebrations reinforce the feeling many parents have of the school as "a close-knit family."
- Teachers collaborate productively using an inquiry approach that improves student learning.
    - All teachers meet weekly within and across grades to share assessments, student work, and plan units together. This year's inquiry focus is on writing mechanics, as analysis of State test results and student work suggests that students express themselves creatively and with voice, but struggle with stamina and writing conventions. This intensive focus on writing has led to the development of thoughtful rubrics for various written assignments and a noticeable improvement in academic writing.
    - Last year, staff tracked the achievement gains over several years of students who received Reading Recovery intervention services and concluded that students showed significant progress. Based on this analysis, the principal agreed to invest further resources in a second Reading Recovery teacher this year and targeted professional development in using these strategies in lessons.

- Staff involve families regularly in discussions about student progress and provide students with opportunities to reflect on their own learning which strengthens home and school connections.

    - In place of parent-teacher conferences, the school hosts family conferences twice a year instead. Together, parents, teachers, and students review student work and help formulate and revise academic goals. Families receive detailed and thoughtful progress reports during the year with both narratives and numerical grades that explain students' strengths and goals.

    - Two years ago, the school piloted student work portfolios. Now, all teachers have students gather samples of their work and reflect in writing on their key learning and growth. As a result, students develop the ability to assess accurately their own learning.

- There is consistency and coherence to many effective instructional practices and school-wide rituals that motivate and engage students deeply.

    - Teachers and staff work passionately and strategically to deliver rich learning experiences for children with an emphasis on shared community values and social activism. For example, the "Honoring the Dream" unit is an interdisciplinary study of civil rights leaders that culminates in research projects, student performances, and a visit to Washington, DC for fifth graders. Teachers support struggling learners with graphic organizers, visuals, audio readings, and other scaffolds, as needed. Various genres of visual and performing arts are thoughtfully integrated into lessons, as opposed to after school enrichment opportunities. As a result, students invest deeply in their learning and make thoughtful connections across content areas.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop structures that regularly evaluate and modify the quality of curriculum and instruction which address the learning needs of students.

    - The outdated curriculum maps and absence of common assessments means that instructional decisions align mostly, but not consistently, to State standards and that new teachers lack valuable guideposts to plan lessons and units. Poor oversight with pacing results in a unit study on civil rights leaders spanning several months and recurring in each grade. As a result, coherence between curriculum, assessments and efficient use of instructional time is lacking.

- Set clear expectations for feedback on student work to ensure that students know next steps for their learning.

    - The school no longer has a math coach and teachers have varied approaches to tracking students' progress in math. Students are assigned to different math groups based on skill, which helps somewhat with more targeted teaching. However, there appears to be little monitoring of math teaching and learning, with students unclear about important steps to advance their learning.

- Teachers confer regularly with students during their literacy blocks, but there is less consistency of feedback in other content areas. As a result, students and parents rely on conferences and progress reports for updates on student learning. Even with this year's focus on writing, students receive little feedback, in some cases, to push their writing to higher levels.

- Establish a systematic approach to the gathering, analysis, and use of data at the whole school level, especially in social studies and science, to improve understanding of students' learning progress.

  - Staff administer regular literacy and math assessments and then use the data to modify lesson plans and student groupings. For other subject areas, however, teachers do not sufficiently review item analyses or monitor trends of student progress. In social studies, for example, student performance on the State assessment has dropped from 81% meeting or exceeding standards in 2007 to 59% in 2009, but no formal analysis has been conducted by school leader or faculty to understand or address this decline. In science, students perform well on the State science exam, but no steps have been taken to understand why girls outperform boys in science at the school.

- Integrate technology more fully in instruction and operation of the school and maximize resource allocations to benefit student achievement.

  - Students and teachers use computers in a limited way, generally for research purposes. While a key instructional goal is to infuse students with an appreciation for diversity, teachers miss opportunities to use technology as a vehicle for exploring the world beyond New York City. Furthermore, staff do not use technology sufficiently to invigorate home-school communications, such as posting of homework assignments and materials. Currently, the school lacks important technology resources.

  - With $50,000 of debt rolling into next school year's budget, the school has not been able to implement a Collaborative Team Teaching class for students, despite identifying this as a current need. These student groupings require difficult adjustments of resources and staffing.

- Develop structures and timelines for monitoring long-term goals so that instructional and organizational decisions will become more strategic.

  - School-wide priorities are known generally by major stakeholders. Missing, however, are structured times to check in and evaluate how well the goals are being met. Moreover, a review of the Comprehensive Education Plan over two years shows identical needs analysis, goals, and action plans, except the most recent document includes text that reads: "The same trend will continue for 2009 -10 school year." While some instructional planning may span two years, this guiding document does not reflect careful analysis or planning for school improvement.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Children's Workshop 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.				
To what extent does the school regularly…	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.				
To what extent does the school …	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.				
To what extent does the school …	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.				
To what extent does the school…	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.				
To what extent does the school…	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**