

# Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**Harvey Milk**

**High School 586**

**2 Astor Place  
New York  
NY 10003**

**Principal: Alan Nolan**

**Dates of review: May 18 - 19, 2010**

**Lead Reviewer: Doug Knecht**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Harvey Milk is a high school with 95 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 35% Black, 59% Hispanic, 5% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 29% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 is currently unavailable.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.**

Harvey Milk High School is a transfer school with a nurturing culture and a particular focus on serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth. The school's lead partner, Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI), has a long and significant history with the school, playing a central role in shaping mental and physical health supports as well as enrichment opportunities. The school and HMI have also invested in providing training for staff to support students' social and emotional needs, which has resulted in students feeling accepted and reconnected to their education. While the school takes advantage of its small size "to treat the whole child", and there is an active student body, at this time the school has yet to involve the staff and parents and guardians in meaningfully developing and refining the school's goals academically and instructionally. Consequently, there is an inability to coherently implement an instructional agenda and monitor the effectiveness of school-wide initiatives, such as the use of pre- and post-assessment tools developed by teachers to track classroom level learning. While there is growing use of similar assessment approaches, there is no systematic way of evaluating and sharing these efforts. Therefore the staff and leadership are not able to discern if formative assessment practices are positively affecting student learning.

The school's central inquiry team has been using data to create opportunities and interventions to move more students toward an "on time" graduation (in four years). Impact of this collaborative effort can be seen in increased passing rates on Regents test scores when comparing January 2010 and January 2009 data. In addition, the school is establishing structures and opportunities for heightening post-secondary college and job awareness of students. Evidence of more students who are interested, applying, and accepted to college over the past two years indicates these efforts are gaining ground. Despite this necessary work, teachers express a clear interest in returning to the more instructionally focused, collaborative opportunities they experienced in past years. The desire of staff is strong to use common teacher team time to employ structured protocols to look at student work and gauge the effectiveness of teacher curriculum, tasks, and instructional strategies. Since teachers have used time this year to develop curriculum maps, there is an opportunity to build on the inquiry work to date and collaboratively refine these maps.

Communication from staff and the school leadership regarding concerns and achievements is ongoing. Attendance is a focus, as well as credit accumulation and Regents test needs. Individual intervention plans are created for potential graduates, and as a result, school community members express satisfaction with being informed of student progress toward graduation. However, there is an inconsistent use of rubrics or other tools to articulate next learning steps efficiently and consistently with students. In addition, classroom level goals for groups of students and individual students are not clear, thus making it difficult to identify trends in student performance and establish benchmarks for success.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school has an extensive web of socio-emotional, arts, and health-oriented partnerships that result in a multitude of opportunities for students to be engaged and supported by well-trained staff and youth development specialists.
  - There is a deep and fruitful relationship between Harvey Milk High School and its lead partner, Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI). Dating back to 1985, the school was a program created by HMI to serve Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth. HMI has designed the school's health-themed advisory program and trained the teaching staff in facilitating it. HMI also funds a master-level clinician, who is continually on-call for youth medical concerns, as well as augmenting the school's crucial social and emotional counseling, which includes a regular conflict mediation component. In an environment in which the mental health and physical well-being of students is priority number one, the school has a "pantry" of free food, clothing and washing facilities for a student population with homeless or transitory adolescents.
  - The school and its lead partner share in joint leadership through the Collaborative Management Team (CMT), which organizes and shapes the arts, internship, and after school academic enrichment and supports. Some notable opportunities include dance and photography classes; the Theater Development Fund, in which students attend Broadway plays and have discussions with the artists involved; Gayfest, an annual event with a partner that also provides two college scholarships; and Peace Portal, a tutoring session for students that provides a consistent, quiet place to study.
- The safe and nurturing school culture is a haven for at-risk youth such that students are accepted, motivated, and active participants in shaping the school's rituals and policies.
  - Leadership and staff take advantage of the small student population by getting to know every student and "treating the whole child". Class registers are between ten and nineteen students creating a unique opportunity for a personalized learning experience. Students rave that teachers "challenge our strengths and support our weaknesses," and "as comfortable as (teachers) make you, they get you back on track." This year, more incentives and celebrations are offered to honor academic success, and students express increased motivation because of some of these opportunities, such as a trip to Dave and Busters and another to Great Adventure.
  - An active student governing body has created proposals to improve their lives in the school, and the school leadership has listened. As an example, a policy was drafted by students to allow academically successful students, defined as those earning an 80 GPA and attending school 80% of the time, an option for off-campus lunch. Students presented this policy to the School Leadership Team (SLT) and gained its assent. One student says, "Students have a lot of voice in this school." The creation of the Peace Portal tutorial program is another example of the school and HMI hearing the students' concerns and purposefully acting on it.

- A growing focus on college awareness and preparation has yielded increasing numbers of applications to, acceptances from, and attendees in post-secondary learning institutions.
  - Relationships built by the guidance and social work staff, including a partnership with NYU and membership in the College Access Consortium of New York (CACNY), yield college fairs and campus visits as well as pre-college classes taken for high school credit by students preparing for higher education. Increased awareness of SAT prep courses and the implementation this year of a senior advisory to address college concerns continue to push the school toward its goal of 25% of graduates persisting in four-year colleges. The school social worker is also developing a student alumni group to better understand which factors lead to college success and how the school can make adjustments in its resources and instructional program to better prepare students for the challenges of higher education.
- Communication with students and families regarding student successes and challenges is on-going such that student progress toward graduation is transparent and interventions timely.
  - There is a constant exchange of information from between school staff, students, and families regarding academic progress. Attendance monitoring is a high priority for the school administration and parents/guardians and students alike highlight the ritual of daily notification and investigation by staff when students are not at school by 9am. It is also commonplace for teachers to call home with news about student achievements.
  - From the day students transfer into the school there is an intensive examination of the students needs with regards to graduation. Individual plans are created and the on-going outreach with students and families about their performance leads to a consistently heightened understanding of academic needs.
- The consistent gathering and analysis of health, course, and State test data by school leadership and the central inquiry team has created an information feedback loop that has results in essential adjustments in resource allocation.
  - The central inquiry team uses school and student level data to investigate how to improve the health and academic supports for students so that more of them have a chance to graduate on time, in four years. One member of the team has created a graduation-tracking tool with student-specific data, and the team regularly uses this tool to monitor student test and course needs. Intermittently, they use it with students, bringing individual students into a team meeting to share and discuss progress and intervention planning. Consequently, the recommendation of instituting Regents-support days, twice a week during advisory, has yielded gains on the number of students passing State tests from January of 2009 to January of 2010 in all test areas but one.
  - The vast array of student credit needs upon entry to the school has necessitated creative options for credit recovery. Resource investments in independent studies and the use of an on-line service, called “PLATO”, have resulted in additional ways for students to make up lost time out of class. Students remark that these independent learning opportunities “teach the skill of responsibility” because they must take ownership over their achievement and planning.

## **What the school needs to improve**

- Expand inclusion of faculty and families in school-level decision-making so that all constituents are well-informed of the key goals and relevant accountability measures.
  - The school has multiple sets of goals evident in the Comprehensive Educational Plan, the Collaborative Management Team’s strategic plan, and the school self evaluation form. These different lists of goals are not consistently aligned or understood by all constituents. In particular, the school’s academic goals are not supported by explicit action plans, detailing *who* is responsible for *what*. As a result, there is little ability to monitor the effectiveness of implementation efforts and goal-attainment.
  - An instructional agenda, focusing on the infusion of balanced literacy and “Learning to Learn” skills across disciplines, was developed with staff participation in the 2008-09. Teachers express concern that this instructional focus has been “derailed” in 2009-10 by shifting priorities from school leadership. While given time to review the school’s CEP during a SLT meeting, parents and guardians do not articulate either familiarity with the present goals or playing an active role in devising or revising them.
- Renew the use of protocols to examine student work products in collaborative teacher team meetings so that effective instructional and curriculum refinements are identified and shared.
  - Teachers recall that, before this school year, professional learning opportunities included the sharing of concrete instructional strategies they could “use the next day”, such as differentiated lesson plan models and “exit slip” formative assessments. In addition, staff participated in structured discussions to review student work from classroom assignments and collectively articulate next steps for teachers and students. Because these opportunities are occurring less frequently now, with professional development more typically purchased through external vendors, there are few chances for teachers to develop internal capacity and leadership.
  - Teachers across the school have participated in developing curriculum maps, and staff members on the school’s central inquiry team, which meets twice a week, express learning important aspects of data use and State accountability from their work this year. However, a majority of teachers have yet to engage in a rich, on-going collaborative inquiry process, resulting in minimal opportunities for pedagogues to authentically evaluate and inform the quality of classroom instructional and curricular decision-making.
- Develop the use of common diagnostic and periodic assessments so that all teachers differentiate learning goals for targeted students and groups of students.
  - A dearth of teacher-developed rubrics for assignments leaves students unclear of teacher expectations on a continuum of quality. As a result, students do not typically receive detailed, explicit feedback on their academic performance, and clear goals and next learning steps at the classroom, sub-group or individual student level are not evident.
  - The school is drafting a standardized admission diagnostic assessment for 2010-11 in order to add specificity to what is known about student skill levels upon entry to the school. The notion is that this diagnostic will align to the school’s goals of improving literacy and numeracy and other “Learning to Learn” skills. This effort should address the present need of tracking student goals across time.

- Spread the use of classroom-level data tools to track the progress of students in mastering learning standards and better identify trends in performance across classes.
  - From classroom to classroom, there is inconsistent use of transparent methods to inform students of their progress. One example of success in this area is the “Green-Yellow-Red” chart posted on the wall in integrated algebra class, which depicts the evidence of students mastering (green), approaching (yellow), or failing to master (red) each learning standard. Students in this particular class are prompted to see and discuss their efforts as well as self-monitor their achievement and progress. However, students across all classes do not experience similar ownership of the data that informs their targeted areas of need over time.
  - The school is working to put practices in place and develop tools to analyze trends within or across classes regarding student learning. On a weekly basis, teachers have the opportunity to share concerns regarding student performance and behavior, but this process is not typically informed by classroom level assessments such that targeted next steps are evident.
- Strengthen the structures to monitor the effectiveness of teacher assessment selection and development so that staff members collectively know which practices impact student achievement and foster instructional coherence.
  - School leadership and staff have integrated the use of “exit slips” into some lesson plans, and class visits reveal some use in instruction. Typically, these exit slips ask students, at the end of class, to write down two things they have learned and one thing that remains a question or concern. In addition, the monitoring of assessment development through the lens of student work is not yet at a stage in which teachers evaluate and refine their performance-based tasks periodically to better align with school-wide learning goals and expectations embedded in the curriculum maps. Consequently, systems are not in place, evaluating whether the school’s formative assessment practices are fine-grained or targeted enough to have a significant effect on student learning.

**Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010**

School name: Harvey Milk	Δ	▷	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>		<b>X</b>		
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	Δ	▷	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs?			<b>X</b>	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	▷	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?		<b>X</b>		
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?		<b>X</b>		
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students’ learning needs and outcomes?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		<b>X</b>		

<b>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.</b>							
<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				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X					
<b>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.</b>							
<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			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X					
<b>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.</b>							
<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					
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X					
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>