

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

Edwin Markham School

Middle School 051

**20 Houston Street
Staten Island
NY 10302**

Principal: Emma Della Rocca

Dates of review: November 24 - 25, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Richard D. D'Auria

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Edwin Markham School is a middle school with 1,170 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 23% Black, 42% Hispanic, 26% White, and 9% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 90.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The consistent and strategic leadership of the principal, whose five-year vision guides the school's work, enables it to progress effectively with a collaborative culture of mutual trust and respect. A dedicated and supportive administrative team and faculty developed both curricula maps and unit plans across grades and content areas. These efforts, aligned with the establishment of a uniform school-wide grading policy, result in a cohesive academic program where consistent and fair expectations are the norm.

Unique organizational structures enable students to meet their teachers at different times of the day, thus accommodating natural biological clocks and cycles. In addition, vertical and horizontal structures enable teachers to share and plan collaboratively across three thematic academies, different content areas and grades. The proliferation and embedding of teacher inquiry work into these structures enables teachers to engage in meaningful action research around identified struggling student learners. The school informs parents through a variety of effective strategies, and they have meaningful voice and input through participation in the parent teacher association and school leadership team.

Teachers effectively use technology as an instructional tool. As a result, students have many opportunities to engage in lessons presented with Smart Boards. They routinely use laptops, conduct internet research and use a well-stocked and staffed school library to good effect. Differentiation of instruction is not yet consistent across all grades and subject areas. While most teachers are well versed in the various elements of the workshop model, extended introductory mini-lessons cause some lessons to be teacher dominated. Instruction is often to the whole class rather than customized to different groups of students. Flexible, strategic grouping and use of materials of varying difficulty for each group based upon student assessment data is not yet the routine pedagogy.

There is inconsistent use of rubrics and too little critical feedback to students on how they can improve their work. Thus, guidance on their next learning steps is limited. The use of posted samples of student work with constructive teacher feedback, guided by consistent rubrics, along with student revisions that illustrate progress toward the final product, are not used as routine instructional learning tools in classroom environments.

While the school has begun to focus upon interim and long term learning goals for student groups or identified students, clear and consistent structures for monitoring progress toward goals and making needed adjustments are not yet consistently evident.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Coherent, teacher-developed curricula maps and unit plans, aligned to state standards, support a broad and rigorous instructional program for all students.
 - The principal's leadership and long-range vision, supported by a well-established instructional team, guides the development of effective teacher designed curricula maps and unit plans across grades and content areas that ensure a cohesive and integrated academic program. The schools utilization of the Core Knowledge curriculum results in the embedding of a well-integrated approach to teaching and learning.
 - The school offers multiple, enriched learning opportunities for students through diverse theme based course offerings through its three academies. The arts are a high priority and include twenty first century courses like digital art. The consistent and effective infusion of technology as an instructional tool by teachers results in enhanced student learning.
- Implementation of a uniform school-wide grading policy assures coherence and promotes clear expectations across the school's three academies, resulting in fair and accurate assessment of student progress.
 - The school uses a fair and equitable uniform grading policy, resulting in consistent expectations and assessment of student work across the school. Strong teacher collaboration, coupled with ongoing planning, receptivity to feedback, and willingness to engage in revision led to support of the policy by consensus within the school community.
- Teachers, parents and students are true partners and have a voice in school decision-making, thus fostering a collaborative and caring community built upon reciprocal trust and respect.
 - Parents and students appreciate an open-door policy where administration carefully listens to their concerns and where they have an active voice in decision-making. Parents' input led to the staggering of due dates for student projects to avoid an undue burden. The school's Comprehensive Educational Plan was a collaborative effort where parent members of the school's leadership team played a meaningful role.
 - The school keeps parents well informed through a variety of venues. These include a parent handbook, a monthly calendar that includes a school-wide curriculum map, a parent-teacher association newsletter, a student written school newspaper and regular academy meetings.
- Faculty strategically use a wide array of student performance data to make informed decisions that effectively guide teacher planning and student learning.
 - Teachers are increasingly sophisticated in their analysis of periodic assessment data and are currently cross-referencing the varying results of different assessments to determine reliability. Because of their careful

analysis, they each have a clearer understanding of their students' skill strengths and areas for improvement.

- A knowledgeable literacy coach and a United Federation of Teachers center within the school effectively support teacher familiarity and comfort level with the use of varying assessments. This enables the use of diverse instruments such as Acuity, Performance Series and customized assessments designed using an item bank. They correlate these results with their own assessments, student conferencing, journals and portfolios to establish a clear picture of each student's progress.
- Multiple structured collaborative teacher teams, organized by both subject area and academy, routinely analyze student performance data, engage in action research, and share best practices and effective strategies to foster student success.
 - The school greatly benefits from strategic vertical and horizontal organizational structures that enable teachers to regularly meet and plan collaboratively. Content area inquiry teams provide opportunities for teachers of a subject to meet across grades and academies to engage in deep content area discussions and planning. Similarly, academy inquiry teams enable teachers of varied grades and subjects within an academy to meet and plan. These cross-functional structures provide a comprehensive and integrated approach to planning and collaboration, and contribute to cohesive and integrated teaching and learning.
- Three semi-autonomous, thematic academies provide more personalized and interest based learning opportunities for all students and foster distributed leadership opportunities for both school leaders and teacher teams.
 - The school's organization includes three thematic academies that provide opportunities for students to choose an area of interest: engineering, health or law. Thus, the theme enhances student interest for learning, since class work aligns with the theme. Students engage in opportunities to explore their interests through various guest speakers and class trips.
 - Each academy occupies its own physical space. Each assistant principal ably leads an academy staffed by its own dedicated teachers. They are delegated authority to run their respective academy. Academies provide students with more personalized learning environments where teams of teachers get to know their students well. The model also facilitates distributed leadership to the assistant principals and the teachers.

What the school needs to improve

- Support a more consistent use of differentiated instructional strategies across grades and content areas to meet more strategically the individual needs of every student.
 - Most teachers utilize technology well and implement elements of the workshop model, but extended mini-lessons sometime lead to a teacher dominated approach. Although students sit in groups, the groups are often engaged in whole class instruction, doing the same activity with the same materials. Teachers do not use information from assessment consistently to ensure that lessons are differentiated to accurately meet the needs of all students. Students most often indicated that they sit in fixed groups. Teachers' skills toward implementing a more differentiated approach are more noted in special education and English language arts,

where strategic flexible grouping and teacher conferencing practices are more consistent than elsewhere.

- Develop teachers' skills in using standards based rubrics to assess student work with constructive feedback on students' next steps toward continual improvement.
 - Teachers do not consistently utilize posted student work assessed with a rubric and include constructive feedback as a learning tool. Currently, the work is either not routinely posted in the classroom, or the posted work is not assessed using a standards driven rubric. Typical feedback consists of comments like "terrific" or "great job". Such comments do not inform students about their next learning steps nor guide them on how they can improve the quality of their future work.
 - While some comments may appear in students' journals or portfolios, an inconsistency in the design and application of rubrics is apparent. For example, the scoring range for rubrics in English language arts includes one to four, zero to two and zero to five. Consequently, students are not always clear on the relative quality of their work. A student responded, "I don't know" when asked why one piece of work with seven corrections earned a 4.5 on a one to four rubric while another piece of work with no corrections scored a three on the same rubric. Other students had similar experiences in their portfolios. Overall, there are few critical feedback comments evident, even on seminal project-based assignments.
- Build upon current efforts to shift the nature of parent conversations from information sharing toward reciprocal engagement about the progress of their children toward established learning goals to maximize the potential for student success.
 - Although the school tries to keep parents well informed through a variety of venues, parents report that they are not routinely engaged in conversations about their child's progress toward learning goals. While some teachers may use a form or ask parents "tell me about your child", this is not yet consistent across academies and teachers. The occasional lack of coordination of communication sent to parents from the various academies is also a shared concern. The parent teacher association struggles with typically low parent participation at its monthly meetings.
 - While special education students have Individual Education Plans that include their learning goals, the school does not always clearly explain them to parents or provide parents with the necessary tools to enable them to better assist their child in achieving the established goals.
- Establish more consistent, transparent and cohesive systems for monitoring progress toward the achievement of interim and long term goals across the school.
 - The school has made initial efforts to establish structures for monitoring and evaluating progress toward interim goals, but they are not yet transparent or consistent. While initial efforts to establish class, group or targeted student goals are evident, the establishment of structures and processes for monitoring progress toward achieving the goals and making adjustments during the year is currently a work in progress.
 - Students report mixed familiarity with learning goals, often dependent upon the academy, the subject area, or the teacher. This area is not yet fully developed.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Edwin Markham 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