

# Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**Gaynor McCown Expeditionary Learning School**

**High School R064  
100 Essex Drive  
Staten Island  
NY 10314**

**Principal: Traci Frey**

**Dates of review: January 5 - 6, 2010  
Lead Reviewer: Linda Waite**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Gaynor McCown Expeditionary Learning School is a high school with 200 students from ninth through tenth grade. The school population comprises 14% Black, 17% Hispanic, 53% White, and 6% Asian, 1% Native American 1% multiracial students and 8% not reported. The student body includes 1.5% English language learners and 25% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 92.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

#### This school is Proficient

The Gaynor McCown School recently underwent a successful transition in leadership, after having two principals in its start-up year. The new principal and school leaders are eager to move the school forward. The school's expeditionary learning model provides activities and experiences that prepare students for college and to become informed, involved, and responsible civic leaders. The principal's vision for the school and students is well communicated and supported by all members of the school community. The school's affiliation with Outward Bound brings adventure and discovery into the project-based curriculum. Consequently, students make connections between content and real world experiences that support and extend their learning. Additionally, the school's network of support personnel work collaboratively to develop an advisory program that extends classroom learning, provides in-class guidance lessons and individual sessions that support the academic and personal growth of students.

The school leadership team uses a wide variety of data which they organize to note trends and areas in need of improvement. As a result, the Comprehensive Educational Plan contains focused goals and action plans that guide the direction of the school, drives instruction and accelerates students' learning. The budget aligns to school needs and supports school-wide goals such as: literacy, credit accumulation, and Regents pass rates. School leaders recognize the power of professional development to establish differentiated learning opportunities that challenge teachers to reflect and revise instructional practices to better meet the needs of their students. Grade level teacher teams and classroom teachers utilize a wide range of student work to identify students' instructional needs and develop strategies to promote academic success. While teachers set and share long term goals with students, most do not differentiate long and short-term goals, set benchmarks, or share next steps with parents. This, coupled with the lack of common periodic assessments and a uniform tracking tool, makes it difficult to measure progress over time, and assess the effectiveness of instructional practices on maximizing achievement. The school recognizes that differentiation of instruction is a work in progress with some faculty members using student groupings, various levels of questioning, and tiered application activities effectively to improve students' learning outcomes; however, this is not yet an embedded practice.

The principal's timely review of scholarship results in modification to the curriculum, scheduling, and academic intervention programs. The newly hired Parent Coordinator provides workshops, presentations, and newsletters that enable parents to monitor their child's performance.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal has a clear vision for the development of the school and students that is well communicated, understood and supported by the staff.
  - Data presentations to the school leadership team ensure that goals align to school needs. As a result, the Comprehensive Educational Plan contains focused goals and action plans that promote student achievement.
  - The principal shares goals with the school community utilizing various approaches such as: the school website, faculty conferences, parent meetings, and meetings conducted by the principal for students. Therefore, all members of the school community understand the vision and do their part to support the goals of the school and improve learning outcomes for students.
- School leaders effectively utilize budgetary, organizational and personnel resources to support school goals and student learning.
  - School leaders utilize a school-based option to provide a ninth period extended day program to provide academic intervention services, as well as common planning time for teachers. As a result, students earn credits and meet promotional and graduation requirements. The purchase of laptops, an on-line grading system, an F-status mentor, and professional development, promotes the professional growth of teachers and positively impacts on student learning.
  - The principal carefully selects teachers according to their strengths and assigns them to teach their subject on one grade level. As a result, teachers know their students' needs and provide the supports necessary for students to successfully pass tests and courses. Interdisciplinary grade teams meet once a week to review student work, identify needs, and share strategies that promote learning. The High Flyers Program provides one-on-one support twice a day to at-risk students. Consequently, there is a decrease in behavioral referrals and an increase in the number of students passing classes and accumulating credits.
- School leaders utilize a thoughtful approach to plan professional development that is coherent, differentiated and targeted on achieving teacher goals and improving student outcomes.
  - The principal utilizes teacher surveys, and one-on-one conferencing to develop differentiated goals for each teacher and professional opportunities that are built into the school schedule every Wednesday. Teachers share and discuss best practices which results in revisions to instructional practices, reflection and improved learning outcomes for students.
  - School leaders, in collaboration with teachers, schedule lunch and learn sessions, and organize classroom inter-visitations with colleagues at the school and at other schools. Additionally, teachers attend national institutes focusing on literacy, assessments, expeditionary projects, and grading which is turn-keyed to colleagues. Consequently, teachers expand their expertise,

become reflective practitioners, and align strategies to students' needs in order to promote achievement.

- School leaders and faculty gather and utilize a wide range of formative and summative data to create an overview of the school's strengths and areas of need.
  - Ninth and tenth grade teacher teams use formative and summative data to identify strengths, weaknesses, and commonality of need. As a result, teams focus on improving the organizational writing skills of students in the lowest third of these grades through brainstorming and graphic organizers.
  - Utilization of assignments, tests, authentic expeditionary-based projects and rubrics by classroom teachers result in the identification of students' strengths and weaknesses. Many teachers effectively use this information to group students by skill or performance level and differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of their students.
- School leaders and faculty have structures in place to regularly adjust instructional and organizational practices in response to students' learning needs.
  - The school's weekly and monthly review of attendance highlighted a high rate of tenth grade absenteeism and cutting on Wednesdays. The school re-evaluated scheduling professional development opportunities in the morning and having students report to school later in the day. As a result, attendance rose from 91% to 95% and cutting decreased, allowing more instructional time for students.
  - Mid year and year end review of scholarship and regents data from the first year indicate that some students are not accumulating credit or passing either the Living Environment or Integrated Math Regents. In response, the school expanded course offerings to include three-term courses, and mandated extended day regents prep classes, which result in higher passing rates.
- The school utilizes support services, partnerships and outside agencies to accelerate the academic and personal needs of students and their families.
  - The school's advisory program allows teachers and students to spend prolonged time together as crew members participating in a curriculum that supports classroom learning, team building, and community responsibility. Consequently, students are well known to their crew advisors, feel well supported, take responsibility for their learning, and benefit from additional time on task and additional teacher support.
  - The administration provides professional development for teachers and staff on internet safety, drug/alcohol abuse, and dating. As a result, teachers and staff feel prepared to address teen issues and students feel that their social emotional needs are understood and well supported.

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

- Expand the use of periodic assessments (common assessments) on a consistent basis to track student progress over time.
  - Presently, teachers utilize periodic assessments such as content area writing assignments and projects to identify students' strengths, needs, and next

steps. However, assessments are not always common. Therefore, progress is not consistently tracked and goals and strategies are not always adjusted impeding the learning of some students. Additionally, while parents receive feedback from progress reports, report cards and learning presentations, they do not consistently benefit from periodic assessment feedback that measures progress overtime.

- Formalize the setting of long and interim differentiated goals for individual students, or subgroups in need of additional support by teacher teams.
  - Teacher teams set long term goals that are aligned to student needs; however, they do not fully consider the conditions of learning that will result in mastery.
  - Presently, teachers and grade level teacher teams use various samples of student work to identify students' strengths, and weaknesses that result in an overall goal and strategies for improvement. However, teachers and teams do not set differentiated long term goals, interim goals, and benchmarks necessary to accelerate learning.
- Identify a common school-wide tracking tool that can be utilized by teachers or teacher teams to monitor student performance and progress over time.
  - School leaders utilize many data sources including ARIS, HSST/STARS, and ATS to organize data and identify patterns and trends to make school-wide decisions. However, it does not use a common tool where teachers view the same data. Hence, not all members of the faculty are able to disaggregate data to obtain multiple perspectives.
  - While many teachers are using snap grades to track student performance and progress, it is not yet an embedded practice. As a result, data is not easily accessible at the classroom and team levels.
- Further expand the present data systems for collecting and monitoring student progress in order to ensure that information is used effectively in collaborative inquiry.
  - Presently, the school has structures in place to review and revise grading policy, regents and school exam practices at both mid year and year end. However, the structure does not extend to periodic assessments. Thus teacher teams and some students did not benefit from reports identifying specific learning targets, strategies and activities to improve student learning. Furthermore, some parents did not receive the detailed information to support their child's learning.

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

<b>School name: Gaynor McCown Expeditionary Learning School</b>	△	➤	✓	+
<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>	△	➤	✓	+
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>	△	➤	✓	+
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>