

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

The Rafael Hernandez School of the Performing Arts

Middle School 217

**977 Fox Street
Bronx
NY 10459**

Principal: Seth Litt

Dates of review: April 29 & 30, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Karen Cohen Ames

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Rafael Hernandez School of the Performing Arts is a grade 6-8 Middle School with 349 students. The school population comprises 24% Black, 72% Hispanic, 0% White, 3% Asian American and 1% American Indian students. The student body includes 18% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the student population and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the 2007-08 school year was 88.3%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 76% eligibility.

The school occupies the first and second floor of a shared campus which also houses a charter school and a middle school that is being phased out. The principal is new to the school, beginning his assignment in July 2008, having replaced a principal who served for only one year.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Rafael Hernandez School of the Performing Arts, under the new leadership of an enthusiastic and committed principal, is in upward progression. The principal provides an interactive, positive and purposeful approach and a supportive school culture. This approach is successful in providing consistency and clarity for student expectations and in soliciting parental and community support for building a strong middle school program. As a result, teachers are engaged in the beginning stages of using data and are supportive in including students in the goal-setting process to encourage accountability. The school is in the exploration stage of linking the use of data to enhanced classroom pedagogy. There are several successful structures in place for teachers and students to maintain information about student progress and to extend opportunities to include parents in the process of good school-to-home communication.

The school environment provides opportunities for mutual respect among students, teachers and parents. Parents feel welcome in the school. The school leadership is well respected and is visible to students and teachers on an ongoing daily basis. This bond is demonstrated by the authentic familiarity and sincerity expressed between the students and the principal in both formal and informal settings. Teachers execute well planned whole-group lessons which follow closely the State curriculum. As the staff matures and the school develops a strong professional development plan linked to ongoing advancement of individual teacher goals, a committed focus to the implementation of teaching strategies and practices focused on the differentiation of instruction will become an even more important part of the school development plan.

The school maintains an engaging performing arts curriculum which has the potential for expansion within the school day and beyond with after school, evening and weekend opportunities. The school leadership is in the initial planning stages of developing a distributive leadership team in order to encourage and include the enthusiastic staff and to gain momentum for the implementation of a strong, school wide instructional initiative.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Staff collaborate well and assist each other professionally.
- Relationships across the school are warm, supportive and inclusive; students, teachers and parents feel valued, and identify with and take pride in being part of the school community.
- The performing arts curriculum provides valuable and interesting opportunities for students to develop their creative and artistic skills.
- The principal is a strategic and reflective thinker who has shared his vision for raising achievement with the school community and is an excellent role model for the students and staff.
- The respectful school culture creates a safe and supportive environment for students' academic and social development and values partnerships for youth development and support services.
- There is effective communication with families, who have high praise for the academic and personal support that their children receive from the staff of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish a systematic approach and extend data gathering and analysis practices to all core subjects to provide a complete picture of students' progress across all aspects of the school, with timelines.
- Define all student goals to include precise, measurable outcomes for each interim checkpoint to monitor progress effectively, sharing differentiated goals more explicitly across the school to reinforce ownership and accountability.
- Develop, with teachers, goals and plans for their professional growth and the improved achievement of their students that reflect and support attainment of school-wide goals.
- Maximize student learning, promote greater consistency in differentiated instruction based on data so that lesson planning reflects purposeful groupings, students are challenged, tasks accommodate different learning styles and questioning extends thinking.

Part 3: Main Findings

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school describes its use of data and assessment as a work in progress that has made gains from the previous year. Teachers administered diagnostic assessments to students in September in both math and literacy. The principal indicated that although data was collected, there was no formal data analysis, as staff capacity is still being strengthened in this area. An annual school wide attendance goal to attain 90% was set and the principal employed the support and diligence of the family worker for daily outreach. Daily attendance incentives are tied into the *Leaders.com* program that has existed in the school, and are showing some positive impact. Systems to collect individual student data are in place. Teachers maintain binders with data from the Design Your Own Assessment (DYO) in math, reading conferences and the "100 book challenge." The school also collects data from Acuity, the periodic assessment. All staff has been trained to interpret data and to use the ARIS system. All the data collected by teachers has provided a baseline of information about students. The principal embraces the need to further challenge staff to cross-reference data between grades and content areas as well as utilize data to group students that are in the "slippable" and "pushable" categories on the New York State exams.

There are programming constraints that still remain from previous years. The principal has been resourceful in scheduling 1:1 student performance conversations with every teacher individually. However, grade level and/or department meetings are not organized as part of the master schedule. Leaders intend to schedule common planning time among grade levels and between content area teachers in order to improve vertical and horizontal articulation of student needs.

Students set learning goals twice per year in each subject area class. The goals are set with teachers based on the results from Acuity. Information is communicated to parents from the teachers directly. In this way they have been able to establish effective communication with families, who have high praise for the academic and personal support their children receive from the staff of the school. Parents say that as a result of this dialogue, they feel more integrated into the fabric of the school and its plan for success.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Learning goals are set for all students in the core subjects of English language arts, math, science and social studies. The goals are posted in all classrooms in each of

these subject areas in the form of content area unit goals aligned to State standards, and are also evident in student folders. As a result, all students are aware of the expectations for their performance and understand the next areas for learning in each of these curriculum subjects. However, instructional plans do not consistently use student data to provide differentiated instruction aligned to individual student goals. This means that students do not know the precise steps required to achieve individual success. An established, systematic approach and extended data gathering and analysis practices to all core subjects including physical education and the performing arts is not yet consistently in place to provide a comprehensive profile of student progress across all aspects of the school.

The principal has made informed decisions regarding the data from the progress report and articulated an intention to focus on making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in English language arts and math, with emphasis on moving those students currently working at levels two and three. Administrators and teachers are monitoring these groups on a regular basis to keep a careful check on progress. The principal is also cognizant of the challenge presented to the English language learners and special education students. Modifications in the delivery of services have been implemented and there is an expansion in the collaborative team teaching classes, school wide.

The setting of student learning goals is intended to involve collection of data every six weeks. However, a calendar is not in place for teachers to remain consistent in timely data collection and there is not a clear understanding of the designated assessment tools to be used to collect formative data. As a result, not all teachers maintain the precise information sources required to ensure steady and consistent progress by all student groups. Student portfolios contain communication with parents and work products related to the curriculum. Refinement of all student goals to include precise measurable outcomes and specific dates for checkpoints to monitor progress effectively are in consideration, to ensure the effectiveness of student data collection.

The principal and teachers communicate their expectations of students in a variety of ways. Workshops for parents are conducted to build capacity to use the “Ed Performance” system. Parents shared their enthusiasm for obtaining information about their children’s progress through the use of technology. As not all homes are equipped with computers, parents indicated a willingness to come to school to work with the parent coordinator and would like to extend the accessibility of hours for the school computer labs, so that they can work with their children and remain informed. The “100 Book Challenge” offers parents the opportunity to monitor student progress; although the template does not yet include the valuable next steps for learning for the students.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The principal and teachers have developed a coherent curriculum in the core subject areas and the performing arts. The performing arts curriculum provides valuable and interesting opportunities for students to develop their creative and artistic skills and students enjoy and appreciate their lessons in these subjects. For example, the band

and chorus classes are very popular among the students as their teachers have high levels of professionalism and commitment to student learning and engagement.

Sound lesson planning is evident throughout the school, with rigorous alignment to the NYS curriculum in each content area. Consistency in following the homework policy is clear across the grade levels and students are generally diligent in completing and returning the tasks set. The principal ensures that classroom resources are appropriately allocated and teachers take time and care to provide positive learning environments for their students. Currently, ongoing dialog about student data and scheduled professional discourse through grade level planning is not sufficiently focused on promoting consistency in differentiated instruction based on data. Present lesson planning does not yet reflect purposeful groupings, appropriate student challenge, tasks that accommodate different learning styles and questioning to extend thinking, in order to maximize student learning.

Staff collaborate well and assist each other professionally and this has helped in developing curriculum documents and a shared bank of resources. Teachers indicate their willingness to move forward in their learning as they feel successful in their journey thus far; moving from the beginning stages of planning instruction to focused planning for differentiation. The staff feel supported by school leadership and are enthusiastic about their shared vision supported by strong professional development opportunities.

The staff are eager to participate in the development of the Comprehensive Education Plan for the next school year, so that the school goals are clear and agreed by all. School leadership is in process of developing and maintaining a strong cabinet to include an additional assistant principal and a literacy coach to further support teachers in continuing to improve the curriculum and delivery. A full time data specialist is also a consideration, as indicated by the principal, who could directly support teacher engagement in data analysis. Budget allocations and assistance from the learning support organization for the core areas, such as literacy, will be integrated into the school learning plan for next year.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Teachers willingly partake in the inquiry team. The team has been effective in providing a springboard for inquiry guidelines and processes. Expansion of the inquiry work to include additional subgroups and cross-referenced data, including updated attendance information, are acknowledged as having a significant impact on school wide practice for improvement of student achievement. Student results are showing improvement in all subjects and grades.

A strong emphasis is placed on classroom observation and teachers appreciate post-observation conferences with their administrators as an integral part of their growth process in teaching and learning. The staff feel well supported in their professional development endeavours. The professional development plan has addressed several school wide goals such as, sessions in English language arts on running records, conferring and sessions on math support provided by the math coach, and ARIS training. As yet, there is not a clearly outlined professional development plan to identify

personal goals and plans, aligned to improving specific student needs. Consequently, professional development sessions tend to be whole-school based, and do not yet fully reflect the needs and requirements of individual teachers.

Relationships across the school are warm, supportive and inclusive; students, teachers and parents feel valued, and identify with and take pride in being part of the school community. Parents partake in a variety of workshops and support-information sessions provided by the parent coordinator, including a weekly class on flower arrangement, which is well attended. Administrators and the parent coordinator take care to canvass the opinions of students and parents and to respond to identified needs whenever possible.

The principal, staff and parents work hard to maintain their relationships with their community based partners such as Morganside Ed, SISDA, SOBRO and the Montefiore Hospital Wellness Program. The respectful school culture creates a safe and supportive environment for students' academic and social development and values partnerships for youth development and support services. The school is a Beacon school with extended hours in the evening and on weekends. Parents would appreciate a wider range of opportunities for students to take part in dance, music and technology after school hours in order to take advantage of the safe and productive alternative for middle school adolescents in the neighborhood.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school goals have evolved from the evaluation of the previous year's practice, alongside analysis of data from both external and internal sources. Teachers and administrators are utilizing data more confidently in order to set these goals. There is however, more work to be done. For example, concise, measurable goals targeted specifically at English language learners and special education students are not yet fully developed and thus, these groups are not yet achieving as well as they could. In addition, administrators are aware that differentiated instruction and small group work is an area of need to guide good student performance and progress. The setting of interim goals with agreed checkpoints and clear success criteria is less well developed. As a result, administrators and staff are not always able to monitor progress towards goals closely enough, or to make adjustments as required, on a timely basis.

The principal is a strategic and reflective thinker who has shared his vision for raising achievement with the school community and is an excellent role model for the students and staff. Much has been achieved in the short time that the principal has been at the school and, with the continued strong relationships and support of staff, parents and students, the school is well placed to continue to improve.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Rafael Hernandez School of the Performing Arts	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>				
	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?		X		
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				
			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>				
	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?		X		
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				
			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X				
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X					
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?		X					
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X				
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X				
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations 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 each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?		X					
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X				
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X				
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed