

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2009-2010**

**Aspire Preparatory Academy**

**Middle School 322**

**2441 Wallace Avenue**

**Bronx**

**NY 10467**

**Principal: Steven Cobb**

**Dates of review: February 25 & March 9, 2010**

**Lead Reviewer: Elizabeth A. White**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Aspire Preparatory is a middle school with 556 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 32% Black, 54% Hispanic, 6% White, 7% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 93.9%.

### Overall Evaluation

#### This school is proficient.

The school has made significant progress since the previous quality review. The principal's "Beyond chalk and talk through curriculum" vision led to a "big tweak" of curriculum this past summer in an attempt to ensure rigor and strategy-based instruction. This effort has led to greater consistency and continuity of instruction emphasized by the statement that, "Our population doesn't call for remediation just rigor". Purposeful programming based on summative data results has resulted in science being offered to students daily and consistency in the method of delivering core literacy and social studies instruction. A math lab has been initiated to support school's efforts with meeting the needs of diverse learners.

The collegiate culture of the school is one of its most commendable features. The principal sets a clear focus and high standards for staff and students while embracing collaboration. Staff and parents take part in decision making through the school leadership team and robust teacher teams. Teacher leadership is encouraged through professional assignments that support student achievement and their social and emotional development. The school is effective in its own use of ARIS but parent's facility with this system is limited. Interim assessments as well as the school's own common assessments and data-based protocols to gather and analyze data are strategically employed to promote student achievement. Whole class goals and interim assessment results are made public and serve as motivation for school-wide improvement. While the school continues to develop its efforts in accessing differentiated strategies to match student needs there is an under-use of subgroup data to inform specific lesson planning leading to some lack of student engagement. Some activities are generic and do not challenge a wide enough range of student capability.

The school has created a "Learning and Teaching" room staffed with academic intervention, testing and coaching personnel. This staff usefully provides teachers with access to data and data analysis support and promotes literacy integration into social studies. Individualized professional development efforts focus on student engagement, specifically in providing choice for students as well as creating performance tasks with rubrics, exemplars and timelines. However, a systemic approach for deepening and presenting data analysis is still a work in progress particularly in science and social studies. Parents receive insufficient communication regarding student progress and learning goals and up to date interim achievement information but even so, families are largely happy with the school. Students and families are supported through many internal and external academic and mentoring supports, such as the Morningside Center for Social Responsibility and the *Leadership and Mentoring* program.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school strategically aligns resources and teacher assignments effectively supporting improved student achievement.
  - The school's program has been creatively reorganized to improve science and social studies results. Daily science instruction is programmed for all students to provide for increased lab time. In addition, the school has adopted a core approach to integrate literacy and social studies instruction. These efforts are more effectively meeting students' needs.
  - Teachers use their professional periods to support colleagues in the school's Learning and Teaching center. The center usefully provides teachers with access to data and data analysis support, enabling them to receive up to date student outcomes from which improved instructional planning is possible.
- The school provides a nurturing environment that encourages students to want to succeed.
  - The school's culture is reflective of a high level of respect. School facilities are kept well and vibrant hall and in-class bulletin boards display student work that promote student achievement. Classroom learning goals are established and interim assessment results are made public in the entryway of the school resulting in a tone of high accountability.
  - "Academic Preparedness," is the focus for the school's advisory efforts that encourages five basic concepts: daily attendance, materials needed, homework done, be on time and in uniform. Parents state that administration is approachable, teachers are accessible and discipline is strict. Both parents and students feel that staff knows them and students can seek and receive assistance as needed to improve their academic performance.
- The school makes very good use of assessments and diagnostic measures that enable staff to effectively plan and evaluate improvement strategies.
  - The school regularly and effectively uses a comprehensive range of data to monitor progress towards school-wide instructional and curricular goals. In addition, the school uses their own assessment analysis template to develop action plans for whole and small group instruction. These efforts have resulted in solid, actionable feedback that informs school-wide practice.
  - The school has focused goals with action plans. There are specific instruments of measure and clearly defined intervals for periodic review of those action plans to ensure opportunities to monitor and revise as needed towards meeting school-wide goals which result in clear next steps.
- Teachers receive specific feedback on their practice and have clear next steps for development and improving practice.
  - Observation practices are based on data before and after classroom visits. A *Pre Observation Conference Primer* template is used to determine how data will impact on instructional decisions. Feedback is provided to teachers

consistently and includes data based commentary that increasingly results in data-based lesson planning.

- Teachers have one-on-one meetings with administrators where student data and next steps for improvement of practice are discussed. New teachers are assigned an F-status mentor for support, partner with buddy teachers or coaches based on need. These efforts keenly support the school's data based culture.
- Teacher teams embedded in the school structure enable teachers to influence school-wide decisions and goal setting that affect student achievement.
  - Inquiry leadership is a professional assignment that empowers teachers to lead their own practice. Teacher teams collaborate to analyze data and student work and develop interventions that lead to improved student performance. These interventions are tested and adapted, based on student outcomes and inform curricular and instructional revision.
- The school offers comprehensive academic, social, and emotional supports to students and families through their internal and external collaborative supports.
  - The school's *Gear Up* grant provides enrichment opportunities and supports Regents preparation and high school admission guidance for students and gives families assistance on how to support students. Laptops, summer and weekend academic programs are offered to students and families through this initiative resulting in improved student outcomes.
  - The Morningside Center for Social Responsibility assists the school by providing training and lesson plans to staff to support student peer mediation. *Aspirations*, is the school-based mentor program where teachers volunteer to take children "under their wing". Parents receive the name of the mentor and are also encouraged to contact them with concerns. The *Leadership and Mentoring Program* is a professional assignment where teachers lead groups of students or "families" that adopt other students. The goal is to provide peer-to-peer support opportunities for students. In addition, guidance and social service staff provides "at-risk" counseling. These efforts have led to a decrease in student suspensions and an increase in appropriate behavior.

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

- Strengthen the alignment between school beliefs and teacher practice to promote engagement, effective pacing, and differentiated strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners.
  - Teachers accurately assess student achievement levels and there is evidence of differentiated lessons in some classes. However, this practice it is not yet embedded school-wide. Often, generic assignments are given with higher achieving students receiving more of the same work resulting in uneven differentiated access to curriculum.
  - Teachers set clear expectations for student tasks via modeling during mini-lessons. However, the extension of upfront teaching time results in low levels of rigor in the pacing of these lessons.

- Expand the use of measureable and differentiated learning goals to ensure student achievement for subgroups as well as students in need of support.
  - Teachers show little evidence of using subgroup data to inform lesson planning, particularly in science and social studies, resulting in uneven levels of student engagement.
  - School leaders and faculty have started a process for unit driven goal setting. However, student specific goals are not established systemically with interim timeframes for monitoring progress towards goals, goal adjustment and refinement. This limits the impact of progress monitoring efforts.
- Deepen data analysis efforts so that instructional practices impacting on student achievement are identified and adjusted as needed to meet the needs of students.
  - Teacher teams use Acuity matrices to gather grade wide and class data to identify student achievement trends. However, further development in identifying instruction strategies to meet diverse student needs is limited.
  - Teams and individual teachers utilize common assessments for pre- and post-unit assessments in math and English language arts but mid unit assessments remain inconsistent resulting in a lack of uniformity across content and grades. In addition, science and social studies common pre-, mid, and post assessments is in development.
- Increase school feedback to families regarding student progress towards meeting school standards and expectations to assist parents in supporting student achievement.
  - The school holds midyear “State of the Grade” parent forums to inform parents on the achievement levels of students on a grade. However, individual student unit goals and the steps they have to take to achieve them are not consistently shared with parents limiting their ability to collaborate with the school to support student learning.
  - The school uses the *Teacher Ease* web-based system for teachers to track student data but parents are largely unaware of their access to this system. In addition, parent usage of ARIS parent link is also limited. These missed opportunities limit the ability of families to monitor the progress of their children.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: <b>Aspire Preparatory Academy</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>