

Quality Review Report 2010-2011

Family Academy

Elementary-Middle School 241

**240 West 113th Street
New York
NY 10026**

Principal: Diana Diaz

Dates of review: November 15 - 16, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Sara P. Carvajal

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Family Academy is an elementary-middle school with 157 students from kindergarten through grade 5 and grade 8. The school population comprises 70% Black, 25% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 22% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 92.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school provides students and adults with an organized and safe environment that is conducive to ongoing learning and increased achievement.
 - Teachers, parents, and students agree that cohabitating with two charter schools in the same site imposes great limitations on the flexible use of space, but this circumstance does not interfere with the school's consistently safe setting. This year, major infractions by students have dropped considerably and no suspensions have been sanctioned to date. As a result, teachers and students stay in the building long beyond the regular school day, engaging confidently in supplemental learning activities, such as professional development sessions and after-school programs, respectively.
 - Students and their families benefit from having two guidance counselors, one social worker, and three administrators continually available to support them, socially and emotionally, with small group counseling and advisory. Consequently, every student in the small school feels they have two to three adults they can turn to for guidance and reassurance during difficult times.
- The school consistently utilizes a balance of internal structures and external partnerships so that students and their families receive social and emotional supports which promote a growing trend of personal success for students.
 - School leadership consistently utilizes its in-house guidance team to model strategies on speaking to students on delicate topics that, at times, impede students' focus on learning. As a result, upper grade teachers, in particular, are equipped to address the adolescent issues of self-esteem, relationships, and bullying.
 - The school has sustained ongoing partnerships with TRUCE and Friends of the Children that provide special outreach and counseling to all students and their families, resulting in improved behavior throughout the student body. Additionally, the school has developed a strong partnership with a neighboring school, creating a stream of "positive cross-talk for the grade 8 males" at both sites, and thereby increasing constructive behavior for this age group.
- The school provides all teachers with multiple opportunities for conversations about effective pedagogy so that the majority of teachers understand the school-wide instructional focus of differentiated instruction.
 - Administrators and teachers share an understanding of the need for increased volume and depth in student writing across all subject areas and use this as one of the school's common instructional foci. To this end, most of the faculty use mini-conferences and small-group strategy lessons as the vehicles that increase achievement among students with greatest academic need.
 - Continuous informal observation feedback, monthly support from contracted consultants, and ongoing teacher team conversations, serve as significant channels that promote the school's high expectations for increased rigor in writing and differentiated instruction. As a result, some teachers across grades concur that they are gaining great momentum in their ability to tailor instruction to the needs and varying learning styles of the individual students they service.

- School leaders have recently implemented structures which empower small groups of teachers to explore student learning issues and take an active role in improving instructional practices across the school.
 - All teachers participate in teacher team work that addresses varying instructional concerns, and one team has begun to use data to engage in authentic inquiry practice at this time. Consequently, several teachers in kindergarten through grade 2 are analyzing how to construct purposeful writing rubrics that support students in increasing their autonomy in the revision of their writing over time.
 - A major shift, which has occurred at the school this year, consists of grade 3 through grade 5 teachers taking on increased ownership of the inquiry-based work. Teachers in the current core inquiry team are pivotal decision makers as they work to make the current curriculum more coherent across subject areas and better aligned with the curriculum requirements of a recently acquired Magnet Grant. As a result, the team is infusing more project-based learning and performance task assessments into the evolving curriculum.
- School leaders and teachers consistently communicate clear expectations to students and their families, resulting in an evolving sense of pride in the school.
 - School leadership uses an automated phone messenger system and a monthly newsletter to provide students and their families with assorted information regarding mandatory attendance, productive behavior, and ongoing periodic assessments. Additionally, the school holds parent workshops on a wide array of topics, including the impact of attendance on student achievement, supplemental education services available at the school, and student work expectations. The school also conducts “Caught Being Good” assemblies as a constant reminder to students and their families that appropriate behavior is worthy. Consequently, both attendance and positive behavior trends of students demonstrate a steady climb, as per monthly snapshots of interim attendance and occurrence reports.
 - Parents are consistently encouraged to participate on the school leadership team, help in the organization of the annual book fair, as well as several school-wide holiday celebrations. As a result, the parent-teacher association is undergoing a renaissance in which a new core group of parents effectively supports the school in seeking creative ways by which to increase family engagement.

What the school needs to improve

- Systematize a structure which enables the effective evaluation of data collection and analysis tools so that these instructional resources are modified, as needed, in support of special subgroups.
 - The school employs an assessment binder system as the primary means for organizing assorted formative and summative student data by class. Currently, school administrators engage in occasional informal conversations regarding the effectiveness of the binder system in moving the school’s instructional agenda. However, at this time, the team has not yet systematically evaluated the content and set-up of the binder system in a way that determines what elements require revision. They also have not reflected on ways to improve the communication of data with students and their families. As a result, the binders do not readily identify students that comprise the most relevant subgroups, and improved

structures to communicate the progress of the students with their families remain unexplored.

- Deepen the rigor of academic tasks so that all learners benefit from learning experiences that stretch their thinking in all subject areas and across all grades.
 - Many teachers in the school plan for teaching points that align well with key State standards, aiming to provide students with the highest leverage for achievement across subject areas. However, at this time, several classrooms demonstrate a great misalignment between these learning objectives and the optimal use of instructional resources and higher order questioning applied during lessons. As a result, there is a great inconsistency across grades in the way that teachers extend students' thinking.
- Ensure that daily instruction is differentiated so that all students are well engaged and adequately challenged according to their specific instructional needs.
 - Teachers admit that they are beginning to learn how effective strategies for differentiating instruction benefit students at all achievement levels. To this end, the implementation of tailored instruction observed in a limited number of classrooms is mostly occurring for students with deficiencies in reading and writing, via small group re-teaching and individualized conferencing. At this time, higher achieving students remain less engaged and enthusiastic in most classrooms, and they openly express that they are not sufficiently challenged.
- Increase alignment between available resources and identified needs so that student achievement is optimized.
 - The school is strategizing the assignment of effective teacher duos and trios in most classes during the regular school day so that the student-teacher ratio is more conducive to differentiated instruction for all students. However, at this time, many supplemental instructors serve exclusively as behavior monitors. As a result, students do not yet consistently benefit from direct instruction in small groups, thereby precluding the maximum output expected of them.
- Strengthen the feedback loop on student work so that students own clear expectations regarding their strengths and areas for improvement.
 - A few teachers have begun to explore the effective development and application of rubrics in the assessment of writing across subject areas. However, the current feedback from teachers lacks clear next steps for students. As a result, many students are uncertain about the writing skills, subject content they have mastered, and where they should continue to bolster their work.
 - Many teachers across grades engage students in conferencing and guided small group work to ensure student mastery of content and skills in all subject areas. However, at this time, too few teachers record the outcomes of these re-teaching experiences, and as such, consistently miss opportunities for capturing key real-time data that highlights students' current strengths and weaknesses for future planning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2010-2011

School name: Family Academy	UD	D	P	WD
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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	
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 Align assessments to curriculum and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?		X		
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, 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		

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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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					
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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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				
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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed