

# Quality Review Report 2010-2011

**Choir Academy of Harlem**

**Middle School – High School M469**

**2005 Madison Avenue  
New York  
NY 10035**

**Principal: A. Ellen Parris**

**Dates of review: February 7 - 8, 2011**

**Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Choir Academy of Harlem is a middle school - high school with 334 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 77% Black, 22% Hispanic and 1% White students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 37% of the students enrolled and girls account for 63%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 87.4%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school provides a safe, caring environment where students appreciate the support they receive for their personal and academic development and their ability to influence decisions and develop leadership skills.
  - The school's inclusive culture allows students to benefit from good interpersonal relationships and additional support personnel. Students and parents appreciate that they can turn to teachers and guidance personnel to help resolve personal issues and concerns that interfere with learning. A review of student suspension data and incident reports to note trends, led to strategies targeting specific groups of students as well as assemblies on bullying conducted by youth officers. As a result, there is a noted decline in the number of both principal and superintendent suspensions and students feel safe and are able to focus more on their academic achievement.
  - Input from the student government, comprised of student leaders from each grade, helped to shape the creation of a youth gardening program as well as the student published newsletter, The Madison Avenue Voice. This demonstrates students' active participation in shaping school wide decisions thereby bolstering their self esteem and the development of their leadership skills.
- The school sustains strong partnerships with varied community and cultural organizations that have a positive impact on students' social, emotional and academic development.
  - Partnerships such as focused collaborations with the Netherland American Community Trust, MAMA I Want to Sing Foundation and the YWCA align with other school-based supports throughout the school day to meet students' social/emotional needs in a cohesive manner. Partners also meet students' needs by helping them develop their creative arts skills as well as providing moral development and counseling support. Services are deeply embedded in school culture and directly support students' emotional needs.
  - The school's guidance counselor share strategies during faculty meetings and provide workshops that support the professional development needs of teachers so that they are better prepared to service challenging students. Consequently, these services integrate well and directly impact students' social-emotional growth as noted in the low referral rate to citywide children's services.
- Administrators and teachers use a wide range of relevant data to monitor student progress, plan instruction and create intervention strategies when needed in order to improve learning outcomes.
  - An in-depth review of students' results on the English language arts exam, ARIS data, and predictive assessments conducted by the administrative team highlighted the need to address the declining progress of the highest achieving students as well as accelerate the growth of the lowest achieving students. Teachers recommend students for specific honor classes and are providing targeted support to students during Test Prep Fridays, after school and Saturday Academy. Strategic efforts result in focused instruction that is increasing student achievement as noted on end-of-unit test results as well as scholarship reports.

- The attendance committee's in-depth analysis of attendance and related services information clearly identifies the needs of students. The committee's strategic efforts demonstrate positive gains leading to a decrease in the number of long term absentees and an increase in the school's monthly attendance rate which results in increased proficiency gains of targeted students.
- Teachers work effectively to analyze data and plan curriculum which informs instructional decision making.
  - Departments create common assessments. These assessments are used to analyze grade and department trends, as well as promote ongoing conversation and reflection, leading to a revision of specific areas in the curricula which align with state indicators. As a result, teachers identify gaps and re-teach particular aspects of the curriculum to solidify learning.
  - Teacher teams organize and review assorted streams of data including Acuity, item skills analysis, exit slips and benchmark assessments in English language arts and math. Teachers assemble data binders to track the progress of the lowest third students resulting in supplemental support during lunch and after school, which raise the achievement levels of these targeted students.
- Differentiated support of teachers reflects the school's commitment to build coherence at all levels in order to improve teachers' capacity.
  - The workshop model solidifies instructional coherence across all grades and content areas. Coaches provide direct support to faculty ensuring that they understand data and integrate SMART boards and other technology tools in lesson planning and delivery. Additionally, focused walkthroughs and formal and informal observations by school leaders lead to differentiated support for teachers. New teachers have assigned mentors to help them develop their pedagogical skills. Math and literacy coaches as well as department chairpersons provide support across content areas. As a result, there is a very low teacher turnover rate and teachers' knowledge base is developing leading to improved teaching practices which positively impact students' academic growth as reflected on formative and summative assessments.
- Leaders align resources and make effective organizational decisions to support improvements in student learning.
  - The principal's budgeting, coupled with staff input results in strategic use of resources that are aligned to the school's goals. The principal expanded the performing arts department to include instrumental music and dance. School leaders ensure that teachers have multiple opportunities to meet, including weekly department meetings, in order to support data analysis and planning, leading to the development of teaching skills. The math coach team teaches with specific teachers. A review of data led to the strategic matching of teachers to support the needs of specific groups of students during Saturday Academy and the creation of the National and Junior Honor Societies to celebrate and support the needs of higher achieving students. As a result, throughout the school, there are swiftly developing levels of shared accountability to accelerate student growth.

## What the school needs to improve

- Deepen and expand teachers' understanding of collaborative inquiry in order to influence teacher practice and student outcomes.
  - The math department's team uses a collaborative inquiry approach including goal setting, reviewing data results and analyzing student work products to note trends, integrate specific skills and modify teaching practices in current and upcoming curricula. These practices are at the beginning stages of extending on a regular basis to other department level teams. As such, all teams are not well aligned, resulting in uneven learning outcomes.
  - Coaches lead each team meeting. Teachers do not yet consistently facilitate meetings on a rotational basis, reflect together on their facilitation techniques in order to effectively use time, deepen their leadership skills and refine tested theories to further accelerate students' growth and achievement.
- Refine action planning by developing measurable interim targets and benchmarks for all plans across the school to monitor progress and growth.
  - Some department teams set appropriate long-and short-term goals and review progress. Additionally, the school's Comprehensive Education Plan includes measurable long term outcomes and school leaders revise plans based on student performance data. However, quantifiable interim progress indicators do not align across all systems so that school leaders and teacher teams can accurately determine the extent to which they are on track to achieve their goals.
- Refine the curriculum, emphasizing rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills for a variety of learners with different needs.
  - School leaders and staff make purposeful decisions that align the curriculum with key standards. Honors and journalism courses help prepare seniors for college level demands. However, projects, challenging performance tasks and higher order skills, although evident in some classrooms, are not yet embedded across all grades and content areas so that students make personal connections to themselves and the world and transfer their learning to new contexts.
- Develop coherence and rigor of instructional practices so that all students make progress via differentiated learning experiences.
  - Teachers utilize differentiated strategies focused on students' learning styles, to tailor instruction with varied methodologies, resources and groupings. However, as noted in instruction and displayed student work, sufficient extensions to challenge higher achieving students so that they are able to learn at high levels, persist in the face of difficulty and further accelerate their own progress, is not the norm across all classrooms.
  - While critical thinking strategies are noted across most classrooms, some teachers do not consistently employ open-ended, higher order questions that lead to increased levels of student engagement. Consequently, classroom discussions where students challenge and support each other's thinking are not sufficiently evident.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2010-2011

School name: Choir Academy of Harlem	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	
<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>	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
<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>	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	

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