

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**Langston Hughes School**

**K233**

**9301 Avenue B  
Brooklyn  
NY 11236**

**Principal: Denean Stephens-Spellman**

**Dates of review: January 25 - 26, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Beverly A. Wilkins**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Langston Hughes School is an elementary school with 646 students from pre-kindergarten through grade five. The school population comprises 96% Black, 2% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 93.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders make informed and highly effective organizational decisions that elevate coherence of practices toward meeting instructional goals. (1.3)
  - In lieu of renewing the traditional purchase of a widely used spelling program, the principal realigned resources in support of students having greater access to informational texts. This decision creates a school-wide awareness of annual instructional goals with the intent of improving literacy performance for all students. Due to a large investment in non-fiction literature, students across grades and programs such as extended day, Saturday Academy, as well as those receiving English as a second language and special education services, read varied informational texts resulting in movement through leveled texts. Evident in a review of student work are clear connections to content learning in the areas of science and social studies.
  - The literacy and math coaches undertake a split teaching assignment whereby they are responsible for the academic progress of a group of fourth graders. In addition, twice per week they work alongside their colleagues as collaborators during dedicated curriculum planning sessions, which includes analysis of student work and the designing of assessments. These dual roles buttress collegial support because their classrooms serve as lab sites for professional learning. As the principal concisely stated, “We work as a team and we work hard to ensure rigorous tasks for our children.” Since these blocks of time are devoted to planning lessons, reviewing student work, evaluating materials, and revising curriculum, students benefit from an intentional approach to improved practice. As a result, all students are engaged in performance-based tasks. For example, fifth grade students craft persuasive writing essays using emotional appeals and a class of third graders demonstrate mathematical capacity through the use of a variety of strategies.
- The principal has created a learning community well focused on student performance with a vision to accelerate learning for all students. (3.1)
  - Working off suggestions from the last Quality Review, the school engaged in an in-depth analysis of State test results prior to the beginning of the school year, resulting in well-crafted interim and long-term instructional goals. This year’s achievement objectives attempt to use citywide instructional expectations and improved teacher effectiveness to reverse previous decreases in English language arts and math performance among groups of students. Because the principal has directed energy and time toward devising a short list of goals of which professional development is the nucleus, 75% of students who performed at level 1 have made improvement on instructionally targeted assessments and the number of students earning honor roll status increases quarterly. Additionally, individuals and groups of students receive complementary counseling services such as anger management and conflict resolution in order to foster positive development toward increased learning.

- The foundation of the school's work to improve student performance is prudent planning and ongoing goal setting based on student work and teacher performance. School-wide goals are evident in key documents including the Comprehensive Educational Plan, the principal's annual performance review goals, and are referenced in School Leadership Team minutes. Identified areas of student need and weaknesses in teacher practice lead to effective professional development that promotes implementation of Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) in order to close gaps in learning.
- Curriculum incorporates CCLS with units of study that embed tasks and rubric-based assessments across grades and subjects in order to close achievement gaps. (1.1)
  - School leaders and faculty make curricular decisions with a keen eye towards State standards and now the CCLS as well. Weekly meetings with the network instructional specialist support teachers to create instructional tasks embedded within the school's selected units of study. Curriculum mapping incorporates essential questions, teaching points, instructional tasks, and pre- and post-assessments. Consequently, the merging of social studies and English language arts curricula provides greater exposure to informational texts like articles, essays, or big books on nonfiction topics. Students also engage in performance tasks that stimulate applications of number sense and operations, which advance preparedness toward higher learning.
  - Teacher teams and coaches examine CCLS, State, and City standards "to plan out teaching points for the units." Subsequent to the teaching of a unit, they evaluate "what worked and what didn't." For example, after looking at drafts of students' persuasive writing, fifth grade teachers decided that author's word choice was a strategy that challenged students. As such, further class work discussing an author's emotional appeal by identifying his/her word choice incorporated students' critique of three short touchtone excerpts. Collectively, teachers redesign existing curricula through teacher planning and discourse in order to include authentic and rigorous learning tasks that cognitively engage a variety of learners, enabling students to practice deep thinking.
- School leaders have a proactive teacher and class observation system in place that articulates clear expectations for teacher practice so that adult learning and professional development increases teacher capacity. (4.1)
  - Administrators provide detailed, constructive feedback to all teachers on instructional practices. Moreover, in addition to formal observations, school leaders and coaches use the Danielson's framework for teaching to provide transparent next steps in teachers' self-identified areas for professional growth. This leads to teachers demonstrating strong consistency in their work and a high degree of professional discourse. One teacher commented that unannounced snapshots of teaching result in soul searching and, as such, teachers realize they need to improve student outcomes and push toward meeting professional and school goals. In addition, out-of-classroom teachers must demonstrate continuous evidence of accelerating students' learning to maintain their assignments, thereby fostering professional capacity building.

- Teachers regularly create student assessments and use the resulting data to adjust their pedagogy, resulting in better student outcomes. (2.2)
  - Teachers collaborate twice per week during common planning periods, which leads to pivotal decisions about ongoing assessment practices. Teachers plan using a back-mapping model to design learning tasks, create assessments and identify teaching points to support students' academic success. This year, teachers collaborate to author pre-assessments and mid-unit assessments that uncover strengths and gaps in what students know and must be able to do. For instance, teachers developed a rubric to link student content learning in social studies with applied opportunities for skill mastery of fact versus opinion. As a result, students performed better on an end of unit assessment.
  - Teacher teams and individual teachers use a plethora of periodic assessments to identify trends in subgroups, resulting in timely identification of support needs in English language arts. Data culled from unit tests, teacher-made assessments, conference notes, and reading growth reports influence changes to class level groupings, learning tasks and use of resources. The assistant principal created a color-coded system to recognize easily at-risk students in kindergarten through second grade. Therefore, early on, students receive appropriate academic interventions in order to limit the need for future services.
- The principal's positive leadership establishes and maintains a scholarly tone, which, together with the school's internal programs and external partnerships, supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults. (4.4)
  - The school implements the Peace Builders Program and holds an annual staff retreat on the School Constitution, both of which equip teachers with effective strategies to use in the classroom, enabling an environment conducive to learning for all members. In addition, Project Safe is a teacher-developed program that encourages positive self-esteem in a small cohort of fifth grade girls, leading to students and staff perpetuating a mutually respectful school culture school-wide.
  - An art club, developed by paraprofessionals, is an outlet for students with behavior challenges. During lunch, students are able to channel high energy levels into creative activities via various art forms. As a result, the rate of incidences within the cafeteria has decreased. Programs such as Lego Robotics, Ifetayo Cultural Arts Academy, and Science Technology, Engineering and Math provide artistic and academic enrichment, ensuring real world learning during regular and after-school hours.

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

- Strengthen and expand communication and collaboration with parents to increase their capacity to assist in their child's learning and to enable them to track progress toward attaining school and class expectations. (2.4)
  - All parents receive a unit-by-unit syllabus at the beginning of the year delineating concepts, content, and skills to be taught throughout the year in all subject areas. Coupled with the school-wide event "A Day in the

Life of a Student”, parents have the opportunity to meet with their child’s teacher, observe lessons, and receive suggestions for working with children at home. However, the school’s communication to families regarding student progress is limited to a quarterly report card. This lack of precise, ongoing discussions with specific ways to achieve next learning steps inhibits parents’ ability to assist their children at home, further reducing effective academic support.

- Enhance teacher questioning and student discussion during the delivery of instruction in order to enrich student participation, thereby increasing opportunities for further development of critical thinking skills. (1.2)
  - Across classrooms, teachers utilize the workshop model as the primary mode of instruction. Instructional coherence is evident in students’ writing samples and math products that make visible the school’s focus on increased differentiated entry points for the purpose of deepening understanding and evoking thinking. Student with disabilities and English language learners participate in small group instruction and teacher facilitated lessons allowing access to learning via guided support. Nevertheless, instructional strategies that offer equal opportunities for all learners to engage in purposeful, deep levels of thinking and participation are not sufficiently in place. As a result, students may not engage as fully or deeply in learning, while higher performing students miss deeper challenges.
- Monitor the consistency of teacher feedback on student work, especially finished products, to make clear to students their next learning steps. (3.3)
  - School leaders and faculty consistently review periodic results, student work, and teacher plans to track progress make necessary adjustments to foster positive impacts across the school. Some finished products undergo a descriptive review process, which informs student narrative reports. When this occurs, students gain considerable understanding of what they have done well and what remains a higher challenge level. However, this is not a common practice across the school. Therefore, while student work is prominently displayed inside classrooms, in corridors, and within folders, some students receive insufficient feedback on the quality of and next steps for their drafts and finished products. Without clear feedback and precise next learning steps, students are hindered from reaching their maximum potential.
- Extend the system for sharing information with families in order to ensure greater coherence of policy and practice toward meeting or exceeding learning goals. (5.2)
  - Rubric-based grading is firmly in place and this supports the school’s efforts to evaluate whether there is alignment between common assessments and the CCLS. Nevertheless, this work has not yet developed into a common use of rubric language across the school. However, some teachers use of “glow” compliments and “grow” suggestions on student work are often vague or brief. The lack of cogent practices for evaluating the effectiveness of feedback systems hampers efforts towards helping student and families understand next learning steps.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

<b>School name: The Langston Hughes School</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?				<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>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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?		<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>	<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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			<b>X</b>	

<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?			<b>X</b>				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			<b>X</b>				
<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, with particular attention to the CCLS?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			<b>X</b>				
<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>