

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

The School of Humanities

Middle School 347

**35 Starr Street
Brooklyn
NY 11221**

Principal: John Barbella

Dates of review: November 9 - 10, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Lillian Druck

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The School of Humanities is a middle school with 482 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 10% Black, 87% Hispanic, 1% Asian and 2% other students. The student body includes 21% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 91.5 %.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's safe and inclusive environment fosters a high level of trust and positive attitudes toward learning, which strongly enhance students' personal and academic development (1.4)
 - The school successfully conducts a Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) to improve student behavior and increase academic and social development. The school's motto, "IS 347 R.O.C.K.S", representing expectations related to respect, on-task, citizenship, kindness, and safety, promotes positive behavior and fosters a learning environment that supports student and adult learning. The program is reinforced in advisory classes through designated lessons and ensures that each student is supported well so that they experience social, emotional and academic success. Program incentives include the distribution of U-rock coupons exchangeable for tangible rewards, which further motivate students to succeed and engage in their learning. The student advisory council provides feedback and suggestions that help refine the practices of the program and increase school-wide awareness of expectations. As a result, the school environment has improved as noted in the positive results of a mock school conducted survey and a sharp decrease of over 30% principal and superintendent suspensions.
- Students and families greatly appreciate the wide range of collaborative internal supports and external partnerships that work effectively with the school to accelerate students' learning. (4.4)
 - After school English as a second language classes and High School Equivalency (GED) courses offer families opportunities to improve their skills and further support their children in meeting academic expectations. Selected students participate in the International Model United Nations program, which engages them in utilizing exemplary communication skills and higher order thinking through debates, diplomatic relations and writing of position papers. These real life learning opportunities enable students to acquire a good understanding of peace keeping organizations and their importance to the future well being of the world. As a result, students who participate in the program benefit from focused youth development opportunities that are tied to the school's goals and that guide them toward postsecondary readiness.
 - The school's PBIS committee created a mission statement along with ten lessons that guide the staff in maintaining a safe and positive school culture. The school provides professional development to enable teachers to implement designated lessons which incorporate specific positive behavior strategies that support students in their learning. A related matrix ensures consistency in the delivery of lessons throughout all grades. The PBIS committee, advisory team, and student council, identify exemplary practices such as task commitment, good citizenship, and cooperation in classrooms, the auditorium, hallways, and other meeting areas. Assembly programs and various school activities

highlight successes, thus promoting a positive climate that celebrates students' academic and personal accomplishments.

- School leaders make purposeful organizational decisions that are well aligned with the school's instructional goals so that all students' needs are met, resulting in improved learning outcomes. (1.3)
 - A full time math and a part time English language arts (ELA) coach who mentor colleagues and teach courses in their respective areas of expertise, and a consultant for the writing program, support the school's instructional goals on improving student achievement. This structure provides opportunities for teachers to visit the coaches and benefit from the modeling of effective classroom strategies. As a result, there are meaningful products in student work folders and on the bulletin board displays throughout the school.
 - Grade 8 higher performing students are programmed for accelerated courses in Integrated Algebra and Living Environment in line with the school's goal to improve the performance of students that are at or above grade level. As a result, 100% of the students passed the math Regents in June, enabling them to be well prepared for high school.
- Teachers effectively use a wide range of assessments that are aligned to the curriculum to guide instructional decisions and inform planning, resulting in a clear understanding of the performance of students. (2.2)
 - The school uses a wide range of assessments and rubrics to guide teachers' instructional and curricular decisions. Teacher teams and individual teachers effectively use baseline data, diagnostic assessments, unit tests, assessments aligned to the National Assessment Educational Progress, rubrics, and other common assessments tied to key standards. This assessment data helps surface common misconceptions and identify strengths and learning needs of individuals and student subgroups across grades and subjects. Grade 7 teachers administered a math pre-assessment to gather baseline data and assess students' mastery of math topics to be covered on the grade. As a result, teachers identified integer operations, division of mixed numbers, and exponents that needed to be prioritized in their lessons. This led to revisions and adjustments in their curricular maps and grade level planning.
- School leaders evaluate the effectiveness of instructional practices with a clear focus on promoting professional growth and reflection thereby impacting classroom instruction. (4.1)
 - The supervisory team utilizes a research-based rubric to communicate clear expectations for teacher practice and provide feedback from brief classroom observations. A feedback sheet that identifies the specific focus of the visit captures strengths, challenges and next steps to support teachers' development. Using a focus for the first set of short cycles of observation around classroom environment, and incorporating two additional foci for the school year related to professional responsibilities and instruction, results in specific actionable feedback to teachers relevant to improving instruction, identifying common practices across the school, and positively impacting student learning.

- Teachers participate in structured professional collaborations, using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership so that student outcomes improve. (4.2)
 - Teacher teams meet regularly and use an inquiry approach, which includes protocols to look at student work, analyze assessment data and remedy weaknesses in classroom practice. The work of the teams results in revisions to curriculum maps, sharing of effective instructional strategies and the ownership of teachers in making key decisions that have an impact on student learning. One teacher team focusing on writing works closely with the writing consultant to analyze student work and assessment data. The analysis of the most recent writing assessment data revealed that over 90% of the students improved their organizational skills in writing. The team also noted a marked improvement in writing by students with special needs. Based on the success of the writing program in grade 6 last year, the team contributed to the school's decision to expand the writing program to all grades this year. As a result, teachers play an important role as key decision makers regarding actions that are contributing to accelerating student learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine teaching practices in differentiating instruction so that lessons fully challenge all students including relevant subgroups, and result in improved learning outcomes. (1.2)
 - Instructional strategies and routines are differentiated across classrooms, enabling students to work in small groups on designated learning activities. The school's focus on various levels of questioning are incorporated into lessons to encourage discussion and increase student thinking. However, lesson extensions and specific scaffolds for English language learners are not fully embedded to push their thinking and broaden their learning experiences so that they meet their full potential. As a result, these students are not always fully motivated to participate in discussions and increase their learning.
- Enhance the delivery of lessons and curricula so that academic tasks promote higher levels of thinking and cognitive engagement for all students. (1.1)
 - The school uses curriculum maps that support rigorous habits and higher order skills and implement standards-based lessons. However, modifications to meet the needs of English language learners and special needs students are not embedded in a coherent manner across grades and subjects. Consequently, lessons and academic tasks do not consistently incorporate critical thinking skills to continually engage all students in developing cognitive thinking skills. This limits the achievement of subgroups of students as evident in the school's Progress Report and State accountability achievement status.
- Provide for consistency in goal setting by identifying precise short-term goals targeted to meet the identified needs of subgroups of students in order to increase learning outcomes. (3.2)

- Teachers use data regularly to set students' learning goals across grades and subjects to improve learning. However, goals are sometimes broad and lack specific interim benchmarks, particularly for English language learners. Consequently, learning goals for some students are not timely, and well defined, leading to the lack of differentiated tasks matched to students' needs.
- Expand systems for measuring progress towards the achievement of short- and long-term goals so that timely adjustments are made across the school to accelerate student learning. (5.3)
 - The school has systems to measure progress toward interim goals, and the use of various tools helps to periodically identify areas of need. However, action plans do not include projected gains for interim measures of progress, particularly for subgroups of students. This limits the school's ability to evaluate the effectiveness of plans and expedite revisions to maximize impact and accelerate learning for all students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: The School of Humanities	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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			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, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			X	
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?			X	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?			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 staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			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, 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?				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, with particular attention to the CCLS?			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