

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**School for Democracy and Leadership**

**Middle - High School 533**

**600 Kingston Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11203**

**Principal: James Olearchik**

**Review Dates: March 5 - 6, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Jill Herman**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

School for Democracy and Leadership is a middle-high school with 400 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 91% Black, 6% Hispanic, and 1% White. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 83.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders make decisions allocating resources, both time and money, that are intentional and strategic in order to support and strengthen student achievement. (1.3)
  - The newly appointed principal, after being hit by a budget loss, closely examined the school's needs. He reassigned a middle school special educator to the high school. He hired a literacy coach to work on instruction across all grades with core teachers, scheduled classes for those students returning a fifth or sixth year who are committed to graduating, created academies for students who needed to pass Regents' exams, and maintained honors classes. Consequently, all students, both high and low achievers are offered opportunities to succeed academically and graduate with a high school diploma.
  - The schedule allows for teachers to meet both in content areas and grades. Teachers, whose assignments are grade specific, meet at least once a week sharing their work and discussing the students for whom they are responsible. Through sharing content, the math and science teachers were able to coordinate lessons on graphing, strengthening student learning, and demonstrating connections across the contents. When a student is in difficulty, the teachers follow a written protocol, discuss student, develop action plan, and follow up, which has resulted in higher pass rates in class.
- School leaders and staff gather a range of data in order to understand the strengths and areas of need at the school to improve learning outcomes for students. (2.1)
  - School leaders examined both academic and social/emotional data to identify a large discrepancy between class pass rates and those State exams having higher pass rates. This surfaced a need to examine curricula, instruction, and assessments, in order to meet the academic requirements of students. In addition, using the Learning Environment Survey results to address safety issues, both staff and students report that the school is now much safer, there are fewer fights, and students are all in their classes and not in the halls.
  - In the middle school, Acuity results are carefully examined and coupled with class work to target differentiated groups after school, and prepare students for State exams. In high school, both Acuity and mock Regents supplement classroom data to improve learning outcomes. As a result, 8 out of 15 special education students passed the math Regents' in January.
- School leaders and teachers examine grading practices in ways that surface trends and inform curricular decisions. (2.3)
  - In noticing high-class pass rates, in both middle and high school, in which 65% of students' grades were based on two mastery projects per semester, the school identified that these projects were not scaffolded and did not have benchmarks so that many students failed the class at the last minute. Teachers now have benchmarks, and a weekly progress report is sent home so that both students and families are kept current, resulting in the ability to intervene and properly support student to pass requirements for the course.

- Grade teams meet frequently and communicate on Googledocs and Teacherease in order to identify students' areas of need. Writing as identified by a tenth grade team as needing to be addressed, has led to the science teacher being supported by the English language arts teacher to infuse more current informational reading into the science classroom. Middle school teachers surfaced trends from results of State exams and Acuity, greatly informing and making classroom practice intentional, and targeting after school interventions, resulting in students performing higher on Acuity assessments.
- There is a clear set of goals, based on data, designed to accelerate student learning for all grades. (3.1)
  - All goals have action plans with interim and annual benchmarks, as well as strategies to achieve them. These goals are linked to measurable student outcomes, such as increased credit accumulation for ninth graders. As a result, there has been a 20% increase of ninth grade students passing the first semester.
  - Goals that are developed by key stakeholders, principal, teachers, parents, network, and community partner, include group-developed action plans. Team meetings, by grade and content, and discussions with families, provide evidence that the school community is aware of and supportive of attaining the goals. Staff at team meetings, focus on their responsibility and attaining set goals for a particular group of students and are improving student learning by creating clearer benchmarks and weekly progress reports to families, thus demonstrating their involvement and commitment to raising student outcomes.
- School leaders implement a variety of strategies that promote professional growth and development in order to improve students' learning outcomes. (4.1)
  - This year, based on the Learning Environment Survey, the new principal spends a significant part of his day in classrooms, observing and providing feedback. An observation of an integrated collaborative teaching (ICT) class, afforded the principal the opportunity to provide feedback to a special education teacher that she was not a presence in the class, needed to play a larger role, and provided several models for her to examine. Subsequently, during the class visit, the teacher was leading part of the lesson. At a team meeting, a teacher used feedback around forming student groups to help her to be more purposeful around this practice, resulting in strengthening students' work.
  - Professional development is based largely on needs identified in the Learning Environment Survey, individual teachers' needs, and a keen eye towards improving instruction. New teachers who are mentored by the principal, assistant principal or the literacy coach are demonstrating evidence of implementing practices from a research based framework around key components to create a learning environment in which students participate in their own learning. Team meetings drive and support development of instructional strategies by sharing promising practices. A new teacher-leader team, comprised of grade team leaders, identifies and supports their colleagues' areas of need by sharing what different grades are doing, reinforcing school's goals, and providing a safe environment for teachers to express where they need assistance in order to strengthen student learning.

## What the school needs to improve

- Design curricula and assessments across all subject areas that embed rigorous habits, higher order thinking skills and provide evidence of college ready skills. (1.1)
  - Although teachers are planning to implement Common Core tasks, and the written curriculum is aligned to State content standards, there is no evidence in classrooms of key standards being emphasized or students being provided the opportunities to develop thinking strategies, which will impact their ability to successfully complete performance tasks as well as be college ready.
  - Some high school tasks and assessments are formatted in alignment with Regents' exams. Other classroom tasks are very basic and broken down into small discrete questions requiring one word responses which fragments the learning and does not move into the big ideas that push student thinking. In one eighth grade classroom, students who had read 16 chapters of a book, had entries in their binders of setting, characters, main idea, and prediction. However, as the prediction task required no citing of evidence from the text, students are not being sufficiently prepared for performance tasks or higher-level work. Mastery projects are low level and primarily require finding information such as making a timeline. This does not allow students to practice and demonstrate higher order thinking.
- Develop consistency and deepen strategies in classroom routines that will provide evidence of student thinking and engagement. (1.2)
  - Despite smaller class size, some classrooms are arranged in rows with instruction heavily teacher directed, which does not provide opportunities for students to share as well as demonstrate their learning. In other classes some teachers are beginning to have students work primarily in groups, when appropriate. This inconsistency in grouping of students misses out on providing students with well-matched learning opportunities including an inquiry approach, as well as opportunities for students to be actively engaged in their own learning.
  - Most questioning is low level. Teachers ask rapid-fire questions, sometimes ask leading questions, and/or answer questions themselves, thus hindering student participation. Questions often do not provide for student thinking or give ample time for students to think, all of which greatly impacts engagement and students' ability to make sense of the content.
- Ensure alignment of classroom assessments to curricula and school's key standards to capture meaningful data in order to better inform classroom practice and instructional decisions. (2.2)
  - The mastery projects are loosely aligned to curricula, without infusion of higher order thinking skills. As these comprise 65% of student grades, an unrealistic portrait of student achievement is given, severely impacting the ability to assess and improve both instructional and classroom practice.
  - In some classrooms teachers move about checking what students are doing and understanding. In other classrooms, there are not check-ins, resulting in students not being able to do the task and not understanding the material, which impacts their ability to be successful.

- Further strengthen the school's culture and tone in ways that impact students' academic success. (1.4)
  - Rewards systems and celebrations of success, as well as group and school wide team building activities, have been put in place. With the creation of a room for suspended students, students who are presenting difficult behaviors have work to do and are escorted when they need to leave the room, thereby decreasing wandering and cutting. During student passing time, the hallway becomes a place for interactions that do not always demonstrate respect, with students using inappropriate language and body contact, requiring a strong adult presence. This results in behaviors not conducive to learning as students go into their classroom.
  - Most students state that they want to go to college and succeed, however, this is not indicative of all students. Whereas many teachers are helpful and encourage students, currently, there does not appear to be an investment by all teachers in supporting the student population. Advisory, which is only one half hour, one time per week, (except for ninth grade which is three times a week), mainly focuses on study skills or test prep, and only some advisors conference with students. The lack of consistent practices around strengthening students' social and emotional needs to support academic learning limits relationship building and hinders students' growth.
- Strengthen development of systems that evaluate curricular and instructional decisions in order to increase the coherence of practice. (5.1)
  - There are clear data systems to evaluate both class and State exam pass rates as well as student attendance. However, systems or indicators of progress towards implementing the Common Core standards are vague and not evident in classrooms. The principal reports that he looks at teacher effort. By not having clear, measurable outcomes in both teacher practice and student work, coherence and school wide improvement is hindered, limiting students achieving at high levels.
  - The newly organized teacher teams and the school as a whole are developing structures and systems that focus on aligning and strengthening instructional decisions with teachers' capacity building needs in order to improve practices across the school. However, these teams are just beginning to examine student work relative to teacher assignments to surface instructional implications for the Common Core, have not yet identified whether or not their instructional decisions are aligned, resulting in limited understanding of how to integrate this expectation with their work.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

<b>School name: School for Democracy and Leadership</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>		

**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>	<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>	

**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>	<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>		

**Quality Review Scoring Key**

<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>
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