

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**Mahalia Jackson**

**Elementary School – Middle School**

**301 West 140 Street  
New York  
NY 10030**

**Principal: Dr. Beverly Lewis**

**Dates of review: February 8 - 9, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Mahalia Jackson is an elementary-middle school with 680 students from prekindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 61% Black, 35% Hispanic, 2% White, 1% Asian students and 1% American Indian students. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 89.8%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School staff maintains a safe environment and coordinate supports to positively impact students' personal and academic development. (1.4)
  - There is a sense of calm, trust, and respect throughout the entire school. All members of the school community are aware of the school-wide ninety percent or above attendance goal. During monthly attendance meetings, team members review data, note trends and identify needed interventions to address chronic lateness and absenteeism, such as frequent home visits by support staff. These targeted efforts result in an increase in monthly attendance rates and a reduction in the number of tardy students. Additionally, a review of the school survey, suspension data and incident reports by the active pupil personnel team led to the implementation of a Conflicts Arts Team (CAT) three year grant geared specifically to support the social-emotional needs of middle school students through role play and conflict mediation. Consequently, there is a noted decline in the superintendent suspension rate. As such, varying emotional needs are addressed in a highly differentiated manner, enabling students to focus more on their learning, resulting in growth of their academic achievement.
  - Students who edit and publish the school newspaper indicate that their overall organization and writing skills have improved. Select students from grades four to eight serve on the principal's advisory team and provide advice and feedback to the principal on school policies and events. Their input led to a student-created recycling initiative focused on encouraging peers to maintain a clean school environment. Such active participation in shaping school wide decisions helps to bolster students' self-esteem and supports the development of their leadership skills, as evidenced by conversations with students and noted observations during classroom visits.
- The school has strong internal and external supports that have a positive impact on students' social, emotional and academic development. (4.4)
  - Student assemblies, daily morning announcements and hallway bulletin boards celebrate students' academic achievements. The school's principal and coach frequently provide well-delivered professional development to staff. Topics include student anger management, child abuse and behavior modification strategies. As such, teachers are well prepared to utilize techniques that meet the social-emotional needs of challenging students, resulting in academic gains as noted on progress reports and the reduction of guidance referrals on guidance logs. Additionally, added supports from Graham Windham and the YMCA integrate well with school-based guidance services throughout the school day to meet the needs of students and their families. The school's outstanding collaboration with the Big Brothers-Big Sisters program allows staff to serve as mentors to specifically identified students. This has allowed the staff to form confidential bonding relationships with selected students to support their social-emotional growth. The National Dance Institute, Children's Art Carnival and Community Works Art Program provide all students with enriched art experiences. School leaders

recognize that the arts are areas where lower performing students excel. Consequently, the arts serve as an entrée to creating increased levels of student excitement and involvement thereby bolstering students' self-esteem as evidenced in their displayed confidence during student performances.

- Parents are kept well informed, resulting in an open exchange, increased parental support and a shared commitment to the school's goals. (2.4)
  - School leaders, faculty and support staff use phone calls, emails, monthly progress reports, instructional student conferencing and parent conferences to continuously engage families in ongoing reciprocal dialogue about their children's social and academic progress. Students receive verbal and written feedback, and student work products are displayed on classroom and hallway bulletin boards. Pizza parties, monthly attendance, academic and holiday assemblies celebrate student accomplishments. Families report that they appreciate the teacher-facilitated workshops on understanding math and literacy curricula on the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Parents indicate that these structures help to deepen their understanding of the instructional expectations and build their capacity to help their children at home with a focus on narrowing the achievement gap between the neediest and highest achieving students.
  - Parents, who serve as learning leaders, volunteer in the main office, read with individual students in classrooms and support school personnel during lunch and at dismissal. The increase in the adult-to-student ratio in the school is conducive to optimal levels of student safety and success. A broad based level of support results in the active involvement of parents on the Title I advisory committee and the school leadership team. After a review of last year's state assessment data, parents expressed the need for additional after school tutoring support for students. School leaders complied and tutoring services are now provided to specific students. This level of responsiveness makes parents feel valued as partners in the process, resulting in a shared commitment to the school community.
- School leaders' support of teachers reflects the school's commitment to build coherence at all levels in order to improve teacher capacity. (4.1)
  - Frequent informal learning walks consist of the principal, assistant principal, coach and teacher leaders using a school developed protocol and formal observations by school leaders enable teachers to promptly receive verbal and written feedback on their instructional practice. Support is tailored to meet the needs of specific teachers via onsite study groups and attendance at off-site conferences. As a result, several newly assigned teachers exhibit understanding of grade appropriate strategies that elicit basic student understanding. Additionally, after identifying pedagogic trends, administrators provide intervisitations accordingly and plan for future supports, which are facilitated by a coach, teacher leaders and one of the assistant principals. This prompts teachers to refine their pedagogy and fosters teacher growth.
- Teachers create assessment and analyze data which informs planning and instructional decision making to improve student outcomes. (2.2)

- Common assessments created by grade level teams, in addition to selected rubrics, are used to analyze grade level trends and promote ongoing conversations and reflections. In these conversations teachers noted that English language learners have difficulty with content language and that many students are not transferring skills from the elementary to middle grades. This led to a revision of specific areas in the math curriculum, which align with Common Core State indicators. As a result, teachers identify gaps and re-teach particular aspects of the math curriculum, thus solidifying learning. Teacher teams and individual teachers review assorted streams of data, including state assessments, Acuity, the Early Childhood Literacy Assessment (ECLAS) system, interim outcomes and classroom snapshot information, in order to develop a comprehensive portrait of current needs. Teachers assemble data binders and track the progress of English language learners and students with disabilities. This results in supplemental support via small group extended day and after-school programs, which help to raise the achievement level of targeted students as noted on teacher-developed assessments.

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

- Refine the curriculum emphasizing rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills for a variety of learners with different needs. (1.1)
  - Core staff members deliberately adjusted the curriculum in order to integrate standards into English language arts and math units of study. However, students are not engaged in the types of projects and tasks that apply knowledge and so their retention of content information is not solidified. Moreover, performance based tasks that probe for deep understanding and application of learning do not coherently or consistently extend across all content areas or grade levels so that students are suitably challenged, able to make personal connections to themselves and the world or able to transfer their learning to new contexts.
- Strengthen teaching practices so that lesson planning reflects differentiation for targeted students and academic tasks consistently challenge and extend student learning. (1.2)
  - Some teachers utilize differentiated strategies to accommodate students' learning styles. They tailor instruction using specific technology resources and student groupings in order to meet the needs of English language learners and student with disabilities. However, as noted in instruction and displayed student work, differentiated tasks and extension activities to consistently challenge varied ability groups, including higher achieving students, is not yet standard practice. As such, students' ability to learn at high levels, apply learning to new situations, 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 in some classrooms, many teachers do not yet employ open-ended, higher order questions that lead to increasingly high levels of student thinking and engagement. As such, classroom discussions where students challenge and support each other's thinking are not sufficiently evident across grades and content areas.

- Develop greater consistency in evaluating and adjusting instructional practices in order to build coherence and accelerate student learning (5.1)
  - School leaders and faculty plan and develop curricula in the summer and at the beginning of the school year. They are at the beginning stages of establishing specific timeframes to evaluate and further align curricula, instructional units and practices across all content in response to student needs. Consequently, real world connections, higher order skills generating testable hypotheses and sustained conversations that give students the chance to support their views with evidence, change their minds and use questions as a way to learn more, are not yet the norm.
  
- Deepen and expand teachers' understanding of collaborative inquiry in order to influence teacher practice and student outcomes. (4.2)
  - Grade level teams meet weekly to discuss specific skills and strategies. The math department's team uses a collaborative inquiry approach including reviewing data results and analyzing student work products to note trends. However, the development of an inquiry approach is inconsistent across teams. As such, all teams are not well aligned, resulting in uneven learning outcomes.
  - Although grade level teams analyze assessment data, they do not sufficiently reflect on their own instructional practices in relation to achievement results. Consequently, team members are not swiftly adopting changes to their pedagogic strategies after reviewing student work products and, as a result, academic tasks are not rigorous enough to challenge students at all levels and further accelerate student outcomes.
  
- Refine instructional and human resources so that they more closely align with students' needs and support the development of higher order thinking skills. (1.3)
  - The principal's budgeting skills coupled with staff input; result in the strategic use of resources aligned to the school's goals. However, despite ongoing recruitment efforts of the principal, the new English as a second language (ESL) teacher has yet to be hired to replace the former teacher who left the school. This impedes optimal support to further accelerate the achievement and progress of English language learners. Additionally, although computers are available in most classrooms, due to technical barriers such as weak, shared internet access, all teachers have not yet integrated this valuable resource into their long-range plans to enable students to publish end-of-unit reports or projects. As such, research strategies aligned with project-based learning is not yet consistent across all classrooms, precluding students from producing higher level work.
  - Although the schedule allows for grade level teams to meet weekly, and teachers are using professional literature in the planning process to address the needs of their students, the development of differentiated activities and rigorous academic tasks that engage learners at all levels, including special needs and higher achieving students has yet to impact on student outcomes. As a result, teaching practices are uneven and the

academic gap between the lower and higher achieving students has widened.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

<b>School name: Mahalia Jackson</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 <b>Gather</b> 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>	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	

<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>