

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Renaissance Leadership Academy

Intermediate School M286

**509 West 129 Street
New York
NY 10027**

Principal: Qadir Dixon

Dates of review: March 29 - 30, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Renaissance Leadership Academy is an intermediate school with 232 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 63% Black, 35% Hispanic 1% white and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 89.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- 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. All families maintain a scholar email account where they are able to review student progress on the online grading tool, Jupiter Grades. Students and their families also have online access to eChalk where they are able to view classroom assignments. Students receive verbal and written feedback on their performance on tasks aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and student work products are displayed on classroom and hallway bulletin boards. Newsletters, monthly attendance and academic assemblies celebrate student accomplishment. Parents report 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.
 - A broad based level of support results in the active involvement of parents on the school leadership team. English as a second language classes and monthly Enact workshops geared for parents on topics such as cyber bullying and internet usage are well attended by parents. Parents also have the opportunity to learn a foreign language via the Rosetta Stone tutoring system. Families report that the principal and staff listen to parent voice and continually ask, "What can we do better?" After a school-developed survey revealed that parents wanted more on-time access to student achievement data, an online grading system was developed to provide immediate feedback to them. During the parent meeting parents indicate that this level of responsiveness makes them feel valued as partners in the process, resulting in a shared commitment to the school community as demonstrated by their participation in school initiatives.
- School leaders communicate high expectations to staff and students in order to promote adult learning and prepare students for college and career readiness. (3.4)
 - The administrative team, through faculty conferences and weekly cabinet and planning meetings, consistently communicate a high instructional focus. Staff welcome the training provided by their peers as well as network personnel. Teacher teams are granted tremendous autonomy and teacher leaders prepare and share meeting minutes and agendas with the administrative team. The continuous and transparent cycle of support creates high levels of individual and team accountability leading to improved teaching practices and student learning, as evidenced by classroom visits and student work products.
 - Online letters of recognition, student of the week, the Top Ten bulletin board and most improved grade point average awards are but a small

sample of the myriad of ways high expectations are communicated to families and students. A Grammy award winning instructor supports the music program and students are exposed to varied careers in the music industry. The guidance counselor facilitates workshops on the high school application process and proactively coordinates tours to rigorous and academically challenging high schools. This results in a very high number of eighth grade students taking the specialized high school exam as well as auditioning for specialized schools with a focus on the arts or sports. As such, during meetings, parents and students state that they have increased aspirations for college enrollment.

- The school provides a safe, nurturing environment that coordinates supports to impact positively on students' personal and academic development. (1.4)
 - A deep sense of calm, trust and respect permeates the entire school community. During monthly attendance meetings, team members review data, note trends and identify needed interventions to address chronic lateness and absenteeism, including frequent home visits by school staff. These concentrated 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 safety committee, led to two gender-based leadership/advisory groups, Brothers for Leadership and Sisters of Success, geared specifically to support the development of leadership skills and the social-emotional needs of their middle school students. This focused initiative has led to a reduction in the number of student removals from the classroom as well as a notable reduction in principal and superintendent suspensions. Soccer, basketball, track, double dutch and drama after school teams, as well as focused support from staff, ensure that students are known well by varied members off the school community. Students state, "we feel safe in this school" and note that they can turn to staff to help them resolve personal issues and concerns that interfere with learning. As such, varying emotional needs that are addressed in a highly differentiated manner enable students to focus more on their learning, resulting in growth of their academic achievement as displayed on the honor roll bulletin boards.
- School leaders make informed and effective organizational decisions that support improvements in learning. (1.3)
 - The principal's budgeting, coupled with staff input, result in the strategic use of resources that are aligned to the school's goals. The principal proactively seeks additional resources and encourages technology integration through several grant initiatives. All teachers are trained and certified by Smart Tech so that they can proficiently use Smartboards throughout the instructional day, further supporting student engagement. The eChalk online lesson planner enables teachers to share their lesson plans and classroom strategies with each other. Additionally, student work products are published electronically and reflect common grade planning units of study. Students are matched to leveled text and the purchase of periodicals such as Junior Scholastic and Science World support their exposure and understanding of non-fiction text. Consequently, comparisons with baseline data reveals progress in students' independent reading levels, resulting in increased levels of comprehension.

- A hiring committee supports school leaders and ensures that selected staff are cognizant of and well aligned to the school's goals. After a review of data revealed noted declines on state assessment data, the principal ensured that ninety minute math and literacy blocks are now built into the schedule. Most teachers loop to the next grade with their classes for two consecutive years and additional teachers push in to support daily math and literacy instruction across all grades. As evidenced in tracking logs of English language arts and math benchmark assessments, the decrease in the student to teacher ratio supports students' academic development, increases the shared level of accountability to accelerate student growth and is conducive to optimal levels of personal success.
- Students benefit from classroom discussions that foster thinking, generate excitement and support student learning. (1.2)
 - Faculty design lessons using the workshop methodology with teaching points stated as essential questions. Teachers conduct formative assessments using exit slips, online clickers and questions that check for understanding. This solidifies coherence across grades and content. The use of Socratic seminar discussions encourages students to challenge and support each other's thinking. Additionally, teachers foster the development of student writing utilizing the Four Square graphic organizer. Student writing has notably improved and student exemplars are showcased throughout the school. As a result, these structures support a general level of student engagement and are helping to prepare students to meet the rigorous writing demands of high school and beyond.
- Assessment practices help identify student performance and progress so that instructional supports are determined in order to improve student outcomes. (2.2)
 - In addition to using common rubrics, grade and department teams also create monthly common benchmark assessments which are used to identify strengths and needs, as well as promote ongoing conversation and reflection. This leads to a revision of specific areas in the curricula which align with state indicators. Consequently, 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, student work products, exit slips, predictive assessments, item skills analysis and benchmark exams in math and English language arts. Selected students are assigned additional work on the Destination Math online program Teachers assemble data binders to track the progress of specific groups of students, resulting in targeted afterschool supplemental support and small group tutoring during lunch which led to achievement gains of these students as noted on formative assessment tracking logs.

What the school needs to improve

- Further refine the curriculum in order to consistently emphasize rigorous tasks so that higher order skills cognitively engage all learners. (1.1)
 - Core staff members deliberately adjusted the curriculum in order to integrate standards into English language arts and math units of study. However, all students are not engaged in the types of research based

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 extend across all content areas or grade levels so that students with disabilities are suitably challenged, are able to make personal connections to themselves and the world and are able to transfer their learning to new contexts.

- Refine and deepen the work of teacher teams in order to maximize teacher collaboration and improve teacher practice and student outcomes. (4.2)
 - Grade and department teams meet weekly to discuss specific skills and strategies. However the development of an inquiry approach is not well defined across all teams. As a result, team members across all grades do not consistently note trends and sufficiently reflect on instructional strategies, thus missing opportunities to further develop and evaluate the effectiveness of their classroom level instructional decisions on their practices and student outcomes.
 - While teams are teacher led, teachers are not receiving the sufficient support to develop their skills as facilitators of adult learning. Consequently, teams do not reflect together on their facilitation techniques in order to deepen their leadership skills and refine the tested theories to further accelerate students' growth and achievement.
- Expand the use of data analysis to guide the school in evaluating the effectiveness of teacher teamwork so that distributive leadership adjustments are made in a timely manner to further support teacher collaboration. (5.4)
 - The school supervisor personally participates in teacher team meetings so that he is better positioned to support the work. Teams are facilitated by grade and/or department leaders and the principal provides other informal opportunities for teacher leadership development. Although inquiry teams set appropriate goals and track student progress, school leaders have not yet instituted coherent and aligned systems across all teams to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the teachers' collaborations. Additionally, school leaders are now considering formal ways of sharing team findings school wide. Consequently, the benefits and impact of this work are not yet at optimal levels so that pedagogic growth is further accelerated.
- Further refine the uniform classroom observation protocol so that instructional practices deepen and the development of teachers' professional goals is supported in order to promote greater student outcomes. (4.1)
 - The principal utilizes walkthroughs, formal and informal observations to provide frequent feedback and support end of year decisions. Teachers receive informal feedback from the Teachscape tool and formal feedback is provided utilizing a school-developed protocol. These tools, however, are not yet fully aligned to incorporate timeframes for follow-up. Additionally, teachers' professional goals are at the beginning stages of development. As a result, these limitations are missed opportunities to further accelerate teachers' growth, meet the schools' goals and improve student outcomes.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Renaissance Leadership Academy	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