

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**The 47 American Sign Language and English Lower School  
Elementary and Middle School M347**

**223 EAST 23 STREET  
MANHATTAN  
NY 10010**

**Principal: David Howell**

**Dates of review: December 13-14, 2011**

**Lead Reviewer: Jacky Grossman**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The 47 American Sign Language and English Lower School is a K-8 school with 224 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 21% Black, 36% Hispanic, 25% White, 4% Asian students and 13% other students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 40% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 90%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school's nurturing and supportive environment inspires students to have high aspirations for them and makes them understand that they can succeed. (1.4)
  - Staff at the school takes their commitment to this community very seriously, and all aspects of the school consider the needs of both deaf and hearing students and families. For example, in response to concerns about communication on the Learning Environment Survey, the school instituted morning announcements that are delivered via closed circuit television using Sign Language as well as spoken English. Time is also devoted during weekly citizenship meetings to the development of a character trait across the school, such as respect, honor, perseverance and commitment. As a result of the positive climate and accepting nature of the school, both deaf and hearing students express that the school strongly supports their growth, and they identify high aspirations for their futures, such as hopes to be doctors, astronauts and "the first deaf U.S. President."
- School leaders have a strong vision of best classroom practice that drives meaningful feedback and enables teachers to continually improve their effectiveness. (4.1)
  - The institution of a common framework has systematized the informal processes that were already in place. One teacher described her principal has "pushing us with a smile," and shared that this fosters ownership so that everyone can "step up to the plate". At the same time, the principal has a firm commitment to ensuring a high quality teacher for every student. Targeted support is provided to teachers at different phases of their careers. Newer teachers are mentored by qualified colleagues and express that this support has been invaluable. One teacher shared how her questioning techniques have deepened as a result of the feedback she had received from the principal in an early observation this year. Another teacher shared that she is focusing on depth of knowledge in planning tasks as a result of the feedback she has received. Tenure is earned by meeting a series of benchmarks related to student performance, teacher contributions to the larger community, and goal setting beyond the third year of teaching. As a result of the unified processes for both support and supervision, there is a highly reflective culture amongst the staff that has brought consistency of practice to most classrooms within the school.
- Purposeful organizational decisions support the school's goal of access to high quality instruction for all students, resulting in meaningful gains for students with special needs. (1.3)
  - Common planning time exists for all classroom teachers, in vertical teams. This accelerates the implementation of the common core standards, as teachers now build in scaffolds in units of study. The school has directed resources towards an intervention coordinator to ensure that decoding, which is often a concern for hearing impaired and deaf students, is addressed early. To support the school's determined efforts in curriculum mapping, the school purchased an electronic mapping system that enables teachers to work remotely yet still collaborate. All of these efforts have been crystallized in the principal's "bulletin board initiative," which envisions the hallway spaces as key places for both student and teacher learning. The boards are used to highlight work that meets standards as well as work that represents progress for students and they are used as a resource for professional development. As a result of these efforts, many hearing impaired students are performing within range of their hearing peers in areas such as reading and writing.

- The school's commitment to ensuring rigor and equity for both deaf and hearing students is supported by effective staffing. All teachers are fluent in American Sign Language so that any teacher, in any class subject, can effectively communicate with all learners. The principal has also shifted teaching assignments for some teachers to create strong collaborative team teaching pairs and strengthen the vertical teams to use them as team models for others. Class size is small and is effectively reduced further by the presence of at least two adults in every room.
- Teachers share strong beliefs about providing entry points for both deaf and hearing students, ensuring that many individual needs are met and enabling many students to reach their goals. (1.2)
  - The school's mission of meeting the intellectual needs of both deaf and hearing students is carried out well in the majority of classrooms. Instruction is simultaneously offered in ASL as well as spoken English, and careful attention is paid to precision when differentiating. For example, in one kindergarten classroom, while one teacher worked with one group of students on a phonics lesson, a second teacher worked closely with a profoundly deaf student who had no previous access to any language. As deaf students need a way other than phonics to learn to read, the teacher demonstrated the traits of a lemon to get the child to recognize and sign the word "lemon." Equal access to curriculum and maintaining this dual language approach is enabling many students to have their distinct linguistic and academic needs met.
- The principal's expansive understanding of data ensures that there is a comprehensive approach to engaging all community members in the process of improving the school. (2.1)
  - Since assuming leadership of the school last year, the principal has consistently reviewed school-wide summative data to make changes that have positively impacted the school. For example, concerned about relatively low attendance, he had his pupil personnel team analyze trends and patterns and put a system in place to honor outstanding attendance while at the same time improving overall attendance rates. Disturbed by the low performance of students in math, he instituted math journals in most classrooms to better understand where each child's gap is in terms of mathematical understanding. As a result of this close examination of all summative data sources, the school's goals have evolved to meet the demands of college readiness.
  - In an effort to bring transparency to everyone's understanding of rigorous and excellent student work, the principal implemented uniform guidelines for the display of student work in hallways and in classrooms. As time progressed, this process has become a useful and authentic source of important data for teachers and administrators about next steps for both students and teachers. As a result of this initiative, teacher teams have found common ground on expectations for students, and supervisors have been able to give concrete, actionable feedback to teachers.

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

- Develop curricula across all grades and subject areas, with a focus on embedding rigorous, college-ready standards inside of rich, relevant content so that students' experiences are cohesive throughout their years at the school. (1.1)
  - The school has essentially deconstructed their entire curriculum and is rebuilding it in order to incorporate college ready standards and performance based assessment.

One effort made in this direction was the implementation of a common study of the tenth anniversary of the September 11th attacks. Students did research and wrote about different aspects of this event. Some students wrote essays arguing whether or not 9/11 should be a national holiday. While some of the work from this unit showed evidence of sophisticated thinking, it was not fleshed out specifically to emphasize the different degrees of knowledge and information required at each grade level, and in some cases it was only loosely tied to other units of study. The deconstruction has resulted in a lack of coherence between classes and grade levels, with a significant number of teachers expressing confusion over what they are supposed to be teaching, when they should be teaching it and how units are tied together.

- Teachers in the early grades, particularly in the pre-kindergarten classes, utilize a curriculum that is very student centered, hands-on, and designed to take advantage of students' interests. This approach results in accelerated learning for many of the pre-kindergarten students, who demonstrate sophisticated problem solving and analytical skills. As students progress towards the upper grades, however, there are uneven levels of rigor across classrooms. In particular at the middle school level, students are not being given tasks that are uniformly preparing them for high school level work. Students in an eighth grade English class, for example, were doing a task that involved identifying their "best" and "worst" book reviews from a series of book reviews written throughout the year. While lessons and curricula are almost always designed with a universal approach that gives entry to both deaf and hearing students, as a result of low levels of rigor, not all students are producing work that reflects deep cognition.
- Build on existing examples of effective performance assessment to ensure that all teachers can implement it and are using it to help promote reflective practice for their students. (2.2)
  - All students have had at least one experience completing a performance based task. In some cases, tasks were disconnected or loosely aligned with curricula, and students did not emerge from these experiences with enduring understandings. For example, the fifth grade teachers put together a unit on the zoo for the express purpose of administering a performance assessment about the zoo. Teachers expressed that this detachment from curriculum made it hard for them to measure what students really knew and were able to do, and therefore it was hard to plan effectively for the next unit of study.
  - Many teachers are adept at checking for basic understanding on the part of both deaf and hearing students, although there are inconsistencies with respect to ongoing checks for deeper understanding. In the pre-kindergarten classes, teachers take extensive observation notes and monitor their students' progress closely. The kinds of questions they ask when working with individual students prompts students to engage in self-reflection, such as "Why do you think this worked?" or "What's another way you might try and show this?" Older students did not demonstrate the same ability to self-assess. Although some students shared rubrics that were used to evaluate their work, they were not able to explain what the rubrics were actually telling them. While students needs may be met in terms of their ability to hear or not, other needs, such as accelerating problem solving or crafting coherent writing pieces, are not addressed with the same urgency. As a result, groups of students are not taking ownership of their learning and approach learning passively.
- Strengthen teacher team work to incorporate an inquiry approach so that team efforts and teacher leadership directly lead to improving student outcomes. (4.2)

- The school's collaborative and collegial nature provides a positive climate for teams to work together. Both teams observed attempted to utilize protocols in order to structure their meetings, but in both cases, the protocols did not result in equity of voice for all members of the teams or firm adjustments to curriculum or instruction. Student performance assessment results were used as a launching point for conversation but the results were not discussed in terms of identifying gaps in critical outcomes for students. As a result, the teams are not seeing their work directly impact student learning and most of the team members, on both teams, could not identify specific ways in which their practice has improved as a result of their team efforts.
- While some teachers have been identified as possible leaders, for the most part, coaches and consultants organize and run most teacher team meetings and drive much of the curricular planning at the school. As a result, teachers feel their input is not sufficiently considered, especially with respect to the revisiting of curriculum in literacy, math, and American Sign Language.
- Strengthen the tracking of student progress and utilize this information to provide meaningful feedback to students and families that will be useful to them in helping meet their goals. (3.3)
  - School leaders collect a copious amount of summative data and use this information to make decisions about broad curricular or instructional issues. However, this information is not uniformly distilled by all staff, and some teachers are not using their data, summative or formative, to make their own planning or curricular decisions with student needs in mind. While most every teacher has expertise planning instruction that keeps students' hearing needs in mind, other goals are not always tended to in a precise fashion. Although the school has recently begun to institute common performance assessments, some teacher teams are not using the information gleaned from these assessments to reflect on their own planning for individual student needs.
  - Feedback practices to students vary widely across the school. In particular, students in upper grades do not consistently receive the kind of rich feedback that might accelerate their progress, and feedback is frequently offered in a way that prevents students' from truly knowing what is being asked of them. For example, in a sixth grade reading class, students had goals written on their notebooks but could not give examples of what those goals meant or how they were derived. As a result, students lack clarity about next steps and are uncertain about their strengths and weaknesses, making it difficult for them to work towards goals.
- Further develop existing structures to help the school determine the direct impact of decisions made with regard to curriculum and instruction so that there is continuous measurement of effectiveness. (5.1)
  - In an effort to address the curricular disparities throughout the school, the principal has established a core team that is responsible for developing high quality units, mapping them using a digital mapping program, and training their colleagues on these units. The quality of these units has varied and has not maintained adherence across the board to key standards or rich content. Although this process does foster some distributed leadership, it has rendered several teachers unable to measure their students' progress in a systematic way, and left them without the ability to scaffold instruction appropriately across the board.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

<b>School name: The 47 American Sign Language and English Lower 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>	

**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**

<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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