

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Quest to Learn
Elementary School 422

351 WEST 18 STREET
MANHATTAN
NY 10011

Principal: ELISA ARAGON

Dates of review: May 21 - 22, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Elif Gure

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Quest to Learn is a middle School with 236 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 25% Black, 29% Hispanic, 35% White, 6% Asian students, and 1% other students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 25% special education students. Boys account for 65% of the students enrolled and girls account for 35%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 94.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and faculty maintain a highly inclusive school culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults. (1.4)
 - o The school's culture of kindness and respect that is created and sustained through explicit integration of Quest to Learn core values into the curricula and the life of the school, supports all members of the school community towards meeting their academic and personal goals. Values such as "all ideas are improvable" or "diversity creates balance" come alive in classrooms and hallways as students and teachers apply these principles into their teaching and learning. Additionally, Home Base, a daily advisory period provided to the students across all grades, is guided by a teacher-developed curriculum that thoughtfully focuses on specific developmental and social emotional needs of students in each grade. This advisory program provides an added venue for teachers and students to ensure success and to continue to shape the positive tone of the school. Students unanimously report that their voice and participation shape the school's culture, attributing the strong support they receive to the small yet intimate student body and the dedication of their teachers. As a result, students are interested in learning and enjoy coming to school as evidenced by 94.9% average attendance rate, a stable trend over the past three years.
- The school effectively engages families in school decision-making and an open exchange of information regarding student progress toward school and class expectations that result in informed parental support for student achievement. (2.4)
 - o In addition to student progress reports generated at the end of each trimester, the school utilizes Canvas, an electronic learning management system to engage students and parents in a timely communication regarding student achievement. As a student, teacher and parent platform, Canvas assists the school community to proactively pinpoint concepts students are grasping, which assignments they have missed, and who needs extra help, zeroing in on individual student problem areas for early intervention. Parents are automatically co-enrolled in Canvas with students and report that they view their own children's grades, upcoming assignments, due dates, missing work, and teacher communication, and a text or an email message that might state their child needs extra help with a concept, including links and resources for parents to support the work at home. Students also communicate safely with teachers and each other within this system, resulting in online collaborations that improve student achievement. Parents cite a 24-hour response time from school staff for inquiries, ongoing workshops and support for utilizing Canvas and ARIS, and the willingness and dedication of school leaders and teachers to partner with families, as primary reasons behind the granular knowledge of their children's achievement trends and the tools acquired to support success at home.
- The school integration of guidance and youth development services and partnerships with families and outside organizations accelerates the academic and personal growth of students. (4.4)
 - o Quest to Learn through its partnerships with the Institute of Play, the New School and Pearson Foundation as its founding partners support student achievement,

and youth development, as well as preparation for college and/or career. These long-term partnerships enable the school to offer intern, career, and service learning opportunities as well as access to innovative, cutting edge learning tools for students and teachers on all grade levels. The school prepares students for their internships in design, media, and technology institutions, such as MTV and Nickelodeon, through a carefully designed program, which includes weekly meetings with varied foci, starting by helping students gain skills and expertise for internship success. During the next phase, students participate in "practice internships" where they apply and intern for various departments within the school. Following this school-based practicum, students are assigned to internship sites based on interest inventories completed during internship advisories. Additionally, the school's partnership with Mount Sinai allows for health clinic services to be available to students and families at the school site, further supporting physical and emotional well being of its community members and accelerating academic and personal growth of students.

- School leaders make strategic organizational decisions that support the school's instructional goals and meet student-learning needs as evidenced by student work across the school. (1.3)
 - o Strategically built into the weekly schedule, teachers are provided two periods per week to meet with a team of curricular developer and a game designer to develop instructional units and tasks titled Missions and Quests. These learning units incorporate game-like teaching modules about systems thinking, how elements interact and work to meet a goal, while keeping systems in balance and sustained, the groundwork in the school's approach to teaching students to think deeply and apply learning to novel situations. Additionally, at the end of each trimester, student groupings and schedules are changed to allow students to participate in culminating explorations and presentations called Boss Level. During this time, students are provided with workshop offerings designed by teachers and game developers based on personal expertise and interest. Students in home base teams are then given a challenge that requires them to apply critical thinking skills and teamwork, as well as information from the workshop strands that have been designed to prepare them for their Boss Level challenges. Examples of tasks include creating a NYC Travel Website, an exercise video for tens and a performance art. These strategic assignments and student groupings are well aligned to the school's instructional goal of teaching students complex problem solving skills with a focus on process, culminating in the production of high quality work products.
- School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set suitably high goals that accelerate student learning. (3.1)
 - o The school community works towards a long-term goal of improving reading and math outcomes as measured by the New York State exams. Although math outcomes improved measurably and the school achieved marked improvements with struggling students as evidenced by the extra credit earned on the Progress Report last year, long- and short-range action plans exist for all school goals to strategically drive the work forward. Administrative team meets regularly with teachers, staff, and parents, to analyze data, communicate progress, and lend support to teachers in their work. As a result, there is an articulated buy in and strong support towards school goals and the school is progressing towards meeting its goals as evidenced by the predictive assessment results in reading and math that show increased student mastery of key standards.

- The school provides professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth as well as supports for differentiated adult learning that improves teaching practice. (4.3)
 - o Consistent, job embedded, and a differentiated professional development plan, is a core value of the school and clearly reflected in weekly teacher schedules. Professional development opportunities including the summer and yearlong Studio Q, and weekly curriculum development sessions, align well with the school's founding principles and allow teachers to engage in prototyping and iteration of teaching methods and units, supporting school goals and curricula, including the work of involving all student in the Common Core aligned tasks. The collaborative nature of the design of professional development learning activities, and its implementation, involve school administrators, teacher leaders, staff developers, and teachers, allowing all members of the school staff to develop and practice leadership.

What the school needs to improve

- Consistently 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. (4.1)
 - o School leaders support teachers through the use of classroom observation feedback that communicates what teachers do well and what they need to improve. However, language of the school's common framework for effective practice and the teacher feedback does not fully align, hindering school leaders' ability to clearly articulate expectations for effective pedagogical practices and to specifically capture how and why observed teaching practices do or do not meet expectations. Furthermore, student work analysis is not consistently used along with the observation and feedback process, contributing to the developing stage of the school based systems that are used to making informed decisions for staff management, including teacher assignments, tenure, and retention.
- Ensure consistent use of varied on-going assessment practices, and analysis of student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level. (2.2)
 - o All teachers create their own classroom assessments and teachers in teams are working on improving the alignment of their assessments to standards reflected in their units. Although teacher teams utilize the results of these assessments to identify student strengths and weaknesses, discussion and next steps are not focused on patterns and trends of achievement by content and grade against the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Consequently, strategic efforts to improve student outcomes are limited to individual teachers and classrooms, impacting only a limited number of students.
 - o Use of ongoing comprehension checks by teachers, during the delivery of daily lessons is inconsistent across classrooms. Some teachers incorporate strategic, ongoing questioning to ensure all students are able to follow the lesson at hand, while other teachers move from one lesson component to the next without a single check, hindering their ability to make immediate or timely adjustments to the lessons to ensure suitable engagement by all students.
- Increase the coherence of curricula across grades and subject areas with particular attention to standards alignment in order to cognitively engage all students. (1.1)

- o The school has identified some key standards including the development of argumentative writing skills and use of strategic evidence from informational texts to support claims in writing across several content areas in order to promote post secondary readiness. However, the curricular artifacts and discussions with teachers and administration did not provide clear evidence that standards addressed in curricular units progress coherently across the grades in each content area. Although, teacher teams thoughtfully focus on the planning and refinement of lessons, tasks, and strategies using student work analysis and problem solving protocols, to meet the needs of students with disabilities, this process does not yet include a lens to ensure that the highest-level students in each class are regularly challenged to their maximum potential. This limits the school's ability to suitably challenge the highest achieving students to ensure that they are constantly engaged in high demand learning that meets their needs.
- Increase teacher capacity to use strategically varied teaching strategies that lead to high levels of thinking and participation, resulting in consistently rigorous work products. (1.2)
 - o Teachers' lesson planning tools across classrooms consistently reflect the aims, learning goals, specific procedures, differentiation considerations, as well as formative assessments and homework. Across the classrooms visited, teaching strategies reflect consistent differentiation through data-based, flexible student groupings, task and question variance, and controlled text difficulty. Teacher modeling and anchor exemplars also help guide students and ensure access to learning for various student groups and a general level of student thinking, and participation. However, strategic use of questioning to push for high levels of student thinking and participation, and increased student independence was not consistently evidenced across the school. In the majority of classrooms, although sitting in groups, students worked on their own on appropriately challenging tasks receiving feedback from their teachers. Teacher modeling did not promote peer-to-peer discussion while holding students to high expectations around critical thinking backed by inferential or textual evidence. This results in missed opportunities to engage students in debate, student-led discussion, peer review, and other collaborative work to push and refine thinking that impact the rigor of student work.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Quest to Learn	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	
1..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
-----------	-----------------------	----------	-------------------	----------	-------------------	-----------	-----------------------