

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

The Castle Hill Middle School

Middle School 127X

**1560 PURDY STREET
BRONX
NY 10462**

Principal: HARRY SHERMAN

Dates of review: December 15-16, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Kim Adams

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Castle Hill is a middle school with 726 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 32% Black, 45% Hispanic, 2% White, 19% Asian students and 2% other students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 14% 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 91.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's goals, supported by the school community, are aligned with a comprehensive data analysis that narrows identified achievement gaps. (3.1)
 - Administration and teachers did granular analysis of subgroup data from last year's summative student data, teacher observation reports and extenuating circumstances. The school's progress report grade prompted the school to conduct a gap analysis using various data sources such as attendance for students and teachers, the Online Occurrence Reporting System (OORS), test scores and test item analysis to identify specific problems that led to the decline in student scores last year. When the analysis of instructional practices revealed that 6th graders were not transitioning to 7th grade with sufficient independence, the school adjusted the academic and social supports provided to students so that student independence increased, based on their theory of action that supporting the whole child impacts achievement.
- The principal utilizes a progressive analysis tracking tool to measure student progress and performance that has informed the adjustment of school wide instruction and impacted student learning. (3.3)
 - The principal, with support from staff, developed an advanced Excel analysis tool used for recording and tracking trends to inform teachers about areas of further support for their students. Teachers use Acuity information, summative data, attendance, tests and quizzes to engage in "right now goal setting" so adjustments to the curriculum and teaching are made to support student's immediate needs. Students adjust their goals that inform teacher's student groupings. As a result, teachers are planning more closely with a clearer portrait of student needs in mind. Students are aware of their functional correction areas and there is an overall commitment to meeting schoolwide goals.
 - Teachers receive academic and non-academic progress and performance data about their students. They use this to plan for instruction and grouping students. Teachers use this information to target academic intervention for students and to make recommendations for student participation in Regents classes. As a result, individual goals and team goals are adjusted and student individual needs are met.
- School leaders communicate high standards for teaching practices and student learning that are understood by teachers, students and families and have led to changes in student learning. (3.4)
 - The school provides pedagogical feedback to teachers with a focus on six of Danielson's competencies and has articulated raising the levels of practice to align with Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and student needs. Teachers take ownership of their professional improvement by collaborating with

a supervisor to create a personalized professional development plan with professional growth goals. The feedback has impacted the dialogue between the administration and teachers by creating transparency around expectations of teacher practice and enhanced student growth. Students, teachers and the administration all articulate the focus that 70% of students will make one level of progress annually on English language arts (ELA) and math skills aligned to the CCLS. Bulletin boards reflect the monitoring of where each academy is in meeting this goal. The school is focused on exposing students to educational and career paths. Sixth grade students attend college visits, 7th graders attend a career infused trip and the 8th grade students visit various high schools and programs mapped to student goals. These supports consistently communicate high expectations and prepare students for achievement in postsecondary work.

- The school's extensive partnerships with community based organizations and a positive behavior intervention system ensure that emotional, academic and social needs are met, thus improving student behavior and learning. (4.4)
 - PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention System) is utilized throughout the school community and teachers receive extensive professional development on implementing this system. This behavior management system positively impacts student behavior, creating strong communities and deepening relationships with staff. In keeping with the school's focus on the whole child, academic engagement and success as well as social-emotional growth are celebrated on Friday Knights, where students cash in their reward pences for an evening of entertainment with teachers.
 - The school partners with several organizations, such as The PENCIL Partnership Program, The 21st Century Arts program, St. Raymond's Outreach, The Theater for New Audiences, to provide professional development for teachers and families in supporting middle school students. These organizations engage students in non academic and academic support activities that have led to improved student behavior as evidenced by school safety data and positive attitudes towards learning.
- The school has aligned their curriculum with the CCLS and integrated tasks across grades and content areas to promote rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills thus improving student work. (1.1)
 - The school actively uses a data analysis tool to inform decision making in professional development based on gaps and trends in student performance across grades, content areas and subgroups. The analysis of student subgroups revealed some gender disparity with boys performing worse in ELA and lower performance overall for English language learners, students with disabilities, Blacks, Hispanics and overage students. In response, a teacher was purposefully matched with over-aged students, class size was reduced for 7th grade students at risk of not meeting promotional criteria, and teacher teams focused their inquiry work around identified subgroup needs. The school scheduled a summer retreat and with additional meetings to align and integrate Common Core Learning tasks to content units and assessments. The school also uses tasks as pre and post assessments which further inform

instruction and grouping of students for learning. This practice has increased student learning as evidenced in periodic assessments, CCLS task pre and post scores and student work.

- Across the curriculum, tasks are designed to help students use content language in their work, provide explanations for their answers and identify strategies in problem solving. All students, including students with disabilities, are asked to work in small groups to complete high level tasks from teachers and paraprofessionals. English language learners (ELLs) are actively engaged in discussions using high level academic language in a science lesson on mechanical weathering. As a result, there is an increased use of content language in student discussions and work products.
- The use of financial and human resources and the assignment of teachers for specific students are well aligned to the schoolwide goals of supporting student's academic and social needs. (1.3)
 - The school has prioritized its budget to employ two English as a Second Language teachers that address the needs of their ELL population. Additionally, the school invested in personnel by purchasing an additional staff member to drive down class sizes to give greater student support and engagement leading to student learning. iPads purchased for ELA teachers support the planning of Smartboard lessons. Teachers with demonstrated capacity for leadership with deep thinking were placed in key positions to lead initiatives in ELA and Social Studies. Other organizational decisions such as the creation of small learning communities respond to the learning and social needs of the middle school students. As a result, student needs are met with an increased sense of responsibility among teachers to support student progress.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that classroom teaching strategies and questioning techniques are consistently and strategically differentiated in order to ensure all students are engaged in higher levels of thinking. (1.2)
 - Across some classrooms, the objectives in teacher's lesson plans reflect attempts to engage students in rigorous learning activities. However, executions of these lessons were inconsistent across teachers. For example, in a math class, students were asked to identify the slope of a line. For some students, this was cognitively challenging while other students completed the task quickly and had to wait for further teacher direction. In another classroom, with a large number of ELLs, students were comparing literary elements of two poems. However, the ELLs had difficulty accessing the lesson due to limited scaffolds and entry points. Differentiation in student work is at uneven levels across some grades and content areas. This unevenness leads to gaps in student thinking and limits opportunities to engage some learners in critical thinking and higher order tasks.

- Improve teachers' utilization of classroom level assessments and checks for understanding so adjustments to instruction meet student's needs. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams have structures in place to analyze individual student work, classroom performance on CCLS tasks, and grade level summative and formative data provided by the administration. However, the identification of student strengths and needs, in particular content areas for specific subgroups, is not evident across teacher teams. This limits teachers' ability to make necessary adjustments for targeted supports and extensions in the curriculum and classroom lessons.
 - Checks for understanding are uneven across classrooms. Exit slips, teacher questioning and writing for understanding were evident in some classrooms and allowed teachers to address student's errors and misunderstandings. For example, in a math lesson, the teacher asked a student to demonstrate her work on the board and the class engaged in correcting her errors. However, in other classrooms, students were disengaged particularly during long periods of teacher directed lessons or read alouds. Opportunities for adjusting instruction in a timely manner were limited.
- Implement consistent protocols across teacher teams so that inquiry work effectively improves school wide instructional practice and further impact student achievement. (4.2)
 - Teacher inquiry teams meet every week to discuss student work, analyze progress within a unit of study and discuss teaching strategies. While one team clearly focused on looking at student work, another team engaged in discussions that were broader around the need for planning time and making decisions about potential topics for lunch and learns. Additionally, teachers relied primarily on an assistant principal or coach to direct this work. Across teams, meeting structures and protocols are inconsistent and do not typically result in clear decisions about next steps in supporting student progress, thus preventing teachers from consistently making instructional adjustments that address student needs.
- Refine the process for evaluating the alignment and coherence between the use of data tools, teacher teamwork and the sharing of performance data with students and families to increase student learning. (5.2)
 - The school has a variety of tools to analyze student work and performance. In addition to the comprehensive excel spreadsheet on student performance; teachers and students frequently refer to Engrade, an electronic tool for sharing student progress on classwork, homework and unit tests. Families also have some access to Engrade. However, there is no yet an effective system for evaluating the effectiveness of the various data tools or the consistency of their use by students and families. As a result, there is a limited coherence of practices around the use of the data and how families can understand students' next learning steps.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: J.H.S. 127 The Castle Hill	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
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