

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

East Fordham Academy for the Arts

Middle School X459

120 East 184th Street

Bronx

NY 10468

Principal: Tanicia Williams

Dates of review: February 13 – 14, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Sonia Menendez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Middle School 459 is a middle school with 333 students from sixth through grade eight. The school population comprises 12% Black, 85% Hispanic, 0% White, 2% Asian and 0% other students. The student body includes 35% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 92.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The culture of mutual respect and care for students and adults evident throughout the school results in an educational environment that promotes academic achievement and personal growth. (1.4)
 - The excellent relationships within the school community contribute to the success and well-being of the students. The use of data such as attendance, suspensions and student surveys heightened the school's awareness of the need to embrace the Positive Behavior Incentive System that has motivated students and stimulated their personal growth. Students state that they like coming to school, enjoy their classes and feel safe. Students can earn "Cougar Cash" for positive behavior which they exchange for individual or class prizes. Incentives like these nurture students' social and emotional development resulting in an increase in student attendance to 92.1% and a decrease in suspensions.
 - This is the third year for this new small school which is characterized by an ethos of collegiality. Teachers work well as a team and have high levels of investment in the school, which helps lead students to make the best possible academic and personal progress as evident in students' comments, such as "our teachers care about us and help us to work hard." Students benefit from an advisory program and a strong guidance support. Administrators know each student well and codes for discipline include a uniform system with 99% compliance. Students feel that they are cared for and known by the adults in the building resulting in positive responses on the School Survey.
- The school's highly effective use of its resources and strategic organizational decisions lead to successful practices around improving student outcomes. (1.3)
 - The school is continually reflective and seeks to improve the quality of instruction aligned to its school wide goal that all students make adequate yearly progress as measured on the school report card. To this end, the school's schedule allows for common planning time, which is used well to review student work, share best practices and discuss academic tasks aimed at meeting the needs of all students. All humanities classes begin with Sustained Silent Reading resulting in increased stamina in reading as evident in students' reading logs. Teachers have developed challenging tasks for each unit of study some of which require students to compare and contrast, produce authentic writing products or write a reflection taking on a character's point of view. Classroom resources are increasingly aligned to the integrated curriculum providing students with ample supports to increase their reading skills in non-fiction. As a result, student writing demonstrates improvement from the September baseline sample as assessed using a common rubric.
 - As a new school, the principal had the opportunity to hire all of the teachers. Prior to hiring, prospective candidates are asked to meet with the school's personnel committee and to conduct a model lesson. Her

excellent hiring mechanisms and extremely effective support for teachers through professional development and teacher collaboration have resulted in teachers who hold themselves accountable for the achievement of their students as evident in the latest predictive assessment with close to 50% of the students in Tier 3.

- Teams of teachers and administrators refined and aligned the curriculum to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), prioritizing key standards in order to close the achievement gap. (1.1)
 - The school developed a rich, integrated curriculum following a humanities approach that is centered on non fiction with an in depth study of the social studies curriculum so that students engage in challenging tasks. Unit plans are developed based on the CCLS with an emphasis on key standards such as persuasion, compare and contrast and research skills in order to close the achievement gap as seen in the writing samples of English language learners and students with special needs.
 - Teacher teams have successfully planned lessons to support critical thinking by asking students to engage in writing that requires students to support a thesis statement with research evidence. In addition, teachers use rubrics to analyze student work and provide clear next steps so that all students, including English language learners and students with special needs, are guided towards mastery and are cognitively engaged. As a result, formative assessments show that the school is on a trajectory to meet their target for all special subgroups.
- Students benefit from differentiated instruction that provides appropriate challenge in order to maximize student learning. (1.2)
 - With guided support from the principal, assistant principal and coaches, teachers plan and implement differentiated lessons that are aligned to students' strengths and needs. The math curriculum and pacing guide provide teachers with tiered lessons so that all learners, including English language learners and special needs students, engage in challenging tasks based on their level. Teachers consistently work with flexible groups of students on specific content and skill development based on students' needs derived from an analysis of data, resulting in over 40% of students demonstrating progress on the most recent predictive assessment.
 - Across classrooms teachers follow a "workshop" model where teachers provide a mini-lesson, students engage in differentiated group work, followed by a share-out to assess mastery and check for understanding. All classrooms are vibrant places with displays of student work. Students are expected to engage in their learning by expressing their opinions at every opportunity. All literacy teachers begin their lessons with 15 minutes of Sustained Silent Reading. The staff meets regularly to assess the effectiveness of their plans in order to support their students' progress. Consequently, students demonstrate gains on the latest predictive where over 40% of the students show increased progress.
- Teachers collaborate in teams to effectively create common grade assessments that are aligned to the curriculum and customized to meet the needs of subgroups of students. (2.2)

- Teachers use a comprehensive array of assessments to effectively measure student mastery of content and skills in order to build a detailed profile of what each student knows and areas that need further development. In weekly teacher planning meetings, teachers review student work products through an inquiry team and use this information to ensure that the curriculum and the detailed units of study address any gaps so that students who lag behind are provided with extra tutoring support. As a result, the most recent predictive assessment demonstrates a reduction of students in the lowest tier.
- The school is very focused on making adequate yearly progress for all subgroups and has implemented highly effective systems for collecting and analyzing supplemental data through the use of tracking sheets, rubrics, conferring notes, running records, end of unit mastery tests and periodic assessments. Through this work, teachers have up to date information on student progress. Administration and teachers carefully review student performance and progress to explore patterns and trends especially for particular subgroups that may need additional support. As a result, the most recent predictive assessment demonstrates that students in the lowest one-third have made significant progress.
- Well planned professional development is planned in response to findings from classroom observations and analysis of student progress data, resulting in reflective teacher practice focused on improving student outcomes. (4.3)
 - Administrators actively encourage staff to take on leadership roles, particularly in leading weekly professional development sessions. Teachers develop the agenda for their weekly meeting and take turns leading the session. During these weekly meetings, teachers review student work and progress in a climate of collaborative inquiry. They give each other feedback on teaching strategies and provide possible next steps for subsequent lessons. As a result of this collegial and professional environment, teachers feel supported and credit this reflective practice on having a direct impact on improving their teaching.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand the channels of communication and opportunities to increase family involvement so that parents are fully engaged in school decision making and next learning steps for their children. (2.4)
 - Parents feel that the administration and teachers are readily accessible and have a collaborative relationship. Students' progress is communicated to parents through formal written communication and conferences. Although the school provides training on various topics, attendance at these trainings is low. As a result, parents are not fully adept in the use of educational tools and thus are limited in their ability to know their child's next learning steps so they might help them at home.
 - The principal has a clear vision for the path towards excellence for the school and regularly encourages parents to participate in school activities. However, a small number of parents participate in the school leadership team and have limited involvement in key school decision-making policies

resulting in missed opportunities for parents to effectively partner with the school and actively engage in their children's learning.

- Strengthen teacher observation and feedback process so that all teachers receive differentiated information on areas of strength and practices needing further development in order to build on effective pedagogy. (4.1)
 - The principal and assistant principal have established clear expectations and priorities around instructional practice. They have developed frequent cycles of observation and provide feedback. However, feedback is broad and lacks specificity or alignment to collaboratively developed goals. Consequently, teachers do not receive information on their individual next steps towards improved pedagogy, hindering their ability to adjust teaching strategies to meet the needs of their students.
- Ensure that clear and differentiated goals at all levels across the school include interim checkpoints in order to monitor progress toward achievement of goals. (3.2)
 - The school has collaboratively developed goals based on an analysis of data and school needs, especially the goal to increase outcomes for English language learners and students with special needs in order to meet its targets for adequate yearly progress. However, although the goals reflect identified school needs and have annual timeframes, they lack interim checkpoints to monitor progress and ascertain if they are on a path toward mastery and meeting targets, leading to missed opportunities for timely adjustments to instruction and curriculum.
 - The school effectively reviews the progress of students in both formal and informal ways by looking at summative and formative data as well as student work products. Teachers are reflective about their practice, refine their instruction based on review of student work and use this information to set instructional goals. However, this ongoing assessment of progress has not yet resulted in sufficient improvements in classroom practice, thus limiting opportunities for students' academic growth.
- Build on the goal setting process to incorporate short-term timeframes for improving teacher and student outcomes so that needed revision of goals occurs as data is recorded and analyzed. (5.3)
 - The school has developed long term goals particularly around meeting its targets for adequate yearly progress. Annual targets are posted visibly and well known by the staff. However, short-term time frames are not securely set to measure the school's progress towards meeting their targets so that the revision of plans can occur immediately. Consequently, opportunities to make modifications to curriculum and instruction in order to accelerate student learning are missed.
 - The goals for long-range improvement have been focused on making adequate yearly progress for all subgroups. Collaborative work in grade teams is used to review student work and progress towards meeting goals. However, it lacks specific benchmarks with timeframes that students need to reach at certain points during the year. Consequently, the school is not assessing whether it is on track to reach its long-term

goals and is hindered from making immediate adjustments in order to identify specific learning steps to accelerate the progress of key subgroups.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: East Fordham Academy for the Arts X459	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 student 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	
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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