

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**Pelham Academy for Academics and Community
Engagement**

11x468

**2441 Wallace Avenue
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Anthony Rivera

Dates of review: February 13-14, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Elizabeth A. White

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Pelham Academy of Academics and Community Engagement is an elementary school with 224 students from grade 6 through grade 7. The school population comprises 29% Black, 55% Hispanic, 6% White, 8% Asian students and 1% other students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 94.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Curricular decisions have led to the alignment of key standards with CCLS instructional tasks resulting in increased rigor across content areas. (1.1)
 - The school has effectively revamped their curricula to build more coherence and rigor into the instructional program particularly as a result of disappointing ELA state assessment results. For example in mathematics classes students use journal writing to show their proficiency with mathematical reasoning. During team meetings, math teachers plan and develop writing prompts to assess students' mathematical vocabulary usage, explanation of concepts and procedural problem solving. Based on student work teachers discuss ways to model expectations to support English language learners (ELLs) and modify rubric assessments that accompany instructional tasks to increase rigor, particularly for higher achieving math students. Since curriculum across the school reflects the Common Core Learning Standards and encourages students to demonstrate their thinking through habits of writing, the school's efforts have led to positive improvement in the way students demonstrate their conceptual understanding of subject matter.
- School leaders purposefully make organizational decisions resulting in effective structures to support student learning needs. (1.3)
 - The school implements parallel programming to align content area access for ELLs, increase opportunities for mainstreaming for students with individualized educational plans (IEPs) and lunchtime tutoring opportunities for all students resulting in greater student engagement and access to curriculum. Teacher teams use googledocs as a repository to document their work for future augmentation. It is also used by administrators to support individual teachers by giving them timely feedback on their instructional practice. Teachers' assignments and schedules allow for meeting time in double block periods, weekly resulting in enhanced curriculum development and assessment practices. For example, teachers norm the feedback they give to students so that the school has a common standard of expectations resulting in coherence of quality of student work across subjects.
- A highly positive school culture results in students who are effectively motivated and strive to excel. (1.4)
 - Students are highly motivated and care about learning. They are confident, like their school and feel supported by adults. In classes students are focused as evidenced by high participation and acclimation to classroom routines. For example, student to student interactions are respectful and acknowledge the responses of peers during discussions for all viewpoints offered. Students as well as their parents report that adults at the school genuinely care and "will get on you" and "go out of their way" to ensure that they are supported. Teachers meet with students before and after school for 'targeted intervention-based tutoring' as well as lunchtime support as requested. Students state they have influence on

school decisions such as community service choices for charitable drives like canned foods and fundraising for the ASPCA. They participate in a variety of interest-based club offerings such as robotics, volleyball, basketball, step team, chorus and yearbook. Of special note is the school's anti-bullying club called, B.A.C.K. (Bullies Aren't Cool Kids). Over 40 students work with Morningside Center for Social Responsibility to support the newly established peer mediation initiative. The result is a culture where adults hold themselves accountable for student progress that in turn promotes student interest and engagement in their learning.

- Assessment practices are effectively aligned to curriculum resulting in information that informs instructional adjustments. (2.2)
 - Teams of teachers have adapted rubric assessments to align with curriculum. For example, after analysis of student writing samples to assess if students used teacher feedback, a teacher team determined that the rubric had repetitive and confusing language. This has led to the refinement of their assessment tool resulting in a rubric that gives them a more accurate picture of student instructional needs enabling them to provide targeted follow up instruction. Likewise, acuity interim assessment results have also been analyzed and have led to better alignment of teacher instructional strategies with assessments.
 - Across classrooms teachers consistently practice the use of multiple checks for understanding like, 'Thumbs up-thumbs down' during math instruction including concept explanation by students or further inquiry to clarify misconceptions. Teachers then share alternative ways to problem solve. In addition, exit slips are utilized after instruction to assess students' proficiency with learning goals and to determine the foci for next day, 'Do now' tasks, homework assignments and targeted guided instruction. This has resulted in the timely implementation of alternative teacher practice strategies designed to meet the needs of all students.
- A clear school vision for teaching and learning is articulated through focused goals resulting in support by the whole school community. (3.1)
 - The rationale for community supported school-wide goals is based on careful analysis of previous goals and student performance results that include summative and formative data. These thoughtfully planned goals steer efforts to advance student growth and achievement by emphasizing curriculum development and teacher practice over time. Included are frequent cycles of classroom observations with protocols designed to develop teacher pedagogy aligned with a research based framework that will serve as the standard year to year. In this way the school will have a unified belief around the elements of quality instruction. Goals also include the on-going development of rigorous curriculum and aligned assessments to imbed CCLS resulting in student success with completion of tasks that demonstrate their academic proficiency.
 - The school has identified writing as a leverage to accelerate student learning across content areas. The school has hired a literacy coach and writing consultant to support their efforts in developing students' capacity to use evidence based arguments to form and support a claim in ELA and social studies. In social studies for example students participated in a

reader's theatre designed to explore the origins of political parties. Students were then asked to cite historical information to defend their responses. Likewise, in math and science the goal is to use evidence to support technical writing. The impact of this is demonstrated through a culture of on-going teacher assessment, particularly writing in all curricular areas to determine student conceptual understanding. This has also led to changes in instructional practice like the identification of analysis-based focus correction areas (FCAs) used to plan targeted re-teaching determined by rubric-based assessment of student work.

- A philosophy of high expectations is consistently communicated and supported by the school community in a culture of mutual accountability. (3.4)
 - A faithful group of parents attests to the family-like, welcoming atmosphere of the school. They cite the accessibility of both administration and teachers and appreciate their efforts on behalf of their children. Administrators and teachers use a web-based online grading system, that enables greater communication between the school and families. The school provides an on-site lab for parents that offer computer access and translated information and training in the support, planning and decision making needed to advance the education of their children. Parents have also participated in network sponsored *Parent Partnership* meetings. Via this forum parents visit teachers to learn how lessons take shape and the instructional methods used to challenge students as the school incorporates the high demands of the CCLS. This has resulted in accessible and timely information provided to parents about student progress and has given parents tools to reinforce learning in alignment with rigorous expectations at home.
 - Families are made aware of new curricular expectations by participating on the school leadership team. The school also provides curriculum forums and classroom walks with school leaders to see instruction in action. Parents encourage their children to attend school regularly, and participate in well-attended programs like tutorial supports. Parents of ELLs and students with IEPs in particular report that their students' progress academically each year as they move up in grades. This is supported by the increased credit that school has recently received for closing the achievement gap, from 0.75% to 4.55%.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop teacher pedagogy practices that result in strategies that consistently engage all learners. (1.2)
 - Across the school teaching practices are becoming aligned to the newly established curriculum. Students are encouraged to build on the thinking of their peers during group discussions. However, while the school has made significant strides in curriculum development that's inclusive, teacher practices that support the needs of English language learners are insufficient. This results in an environment where not all students are full participants in learning. During a lab lesson ELL's are paired with students who speak their native tongue so that they may receive translation assistance. This dependency does not allow for sufficient engagement and at times hinders the English speaking students.

- Lessons are effectively planned with appropriately rigorous pacing in some classrooms. However, some lessons do not allow for sufficient student practice or end lesson summation. For example, in a science room the teacher scaffolded the entire lab by guiding students step by step throughout the period minimizing the opportunity for student independent exploration and discovery. In another class, student note-taking and distribution of materials limits instructional time resulting in pacing that doesn't allow for summary of learning ensuring the understanding of new concepts. These missed opportunities to maximize active learning resulted in inconsistent student engagement.
- Ensure that feedback to teachers captures c the school's expectations for instruction and provides clear next steps for teacher development. (4.1)
 - School leaders make frequent visits to classrooms to assess teacher practice. However, feedback is not consistently accurate resulting in a lack of clear expectations for improvement. For example, a few comments that identified 'Elements of quality' in observed lessons contradicted suggestions for suggested next steps. Likewise while school leaders make holistic data-based decisions on staff development needs, feedback to teachers does not always capture next steps for growth that is aligned to school expectations. These inconsistencies limit the professional growth and reflection school-wide.
- Develop effective systems to regularly evaluate individual teacher and collaborative group practices that lead to improved capacity building. (5.4)
 - Particularly with curriculum development and analysis of student work, content-based, teacher collaboration is an impactful regular part of the school's culture. However, evaluation processes to directly assess teacher team impact on school-wide classroom practice decisions is not systemic. The result is a limited ability to offer differentiated guidance and resources based on specific team instructional needs. This is a missed opportunity to leverage improved teacher practice and student learning.
 - For some teams support staff leads teacher team meetings resulting in a stymied opportunity for classroom practitioner engagement. It also limits teacher leadership development and voice on decisions that impact student learning.
- Adjust tools for capturing data resulting in accessible information that captures on-going school-wide progress. (5.2)
 - The school makes good use of classroom and individual student data, like regularly sharing performance data with students and families via multiple formats like progress reports and the web-based on-line grade book, 'Skedula'. However, school-wide data is not yet sufficiently organized to allow for a more accessible view of aggregated trends across the school. This limits the timeliness of adjustments that may be needed school-wide. Similarly, while assessment practices are regularly evaluated against expectations based on key standards, the alignment of grading practices determined by teachers is not as frequently assessed. This limits the ability to ensure coherence of school-wide policies and practice.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Pelham Academy of Academics and Community Engagement	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