

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

School of Humanities

Middle School K347

**35 Starr Street
Brooklyn
NY 11221**

Principal: John Barbella, Ed.D

Dates of review: January 29 - 30, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Lillian Druck

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

School of Humanities is a middle school with 501 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 11% Black, 86% Hispanic and 3% other students. The student body includes 22% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 91.8%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and staff work cohesively to promote a respectful, caring environment that supports adult learning and enhances students' academic and personal growth. (1.4)
 - The Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) is used as a school-wide strategy to promote positive behavior and foster a school environment that supports students and adults. The expectations for student behavior and academic achievement are incorporated into daily lessons and displayed throughout the building, thereby establishing a common language that promotes a respectful school culture. The program includes incentives and tangible rewards, which further motivate students to succeed and engage in their learning. The student advisory council meets with the principal once a month to provide feedback thereby contributing constructive suggestions that help refine the practices of the program and increase school-wide awareness of the expectations.
 - Students, staff and families are familiar with the school matrix which details each of the values reflected in the school motto and the expected academic and personal behaviors, thereby ensuring consistency of practice and accountability across the school. Families participate in assembly programs, parent workshops and information sessions that highlight exemplary practices such as task commitment, good citizenship and clear expectations for student behavior, which they reinforce with their children. The staff participates in professional development which guides them in maintaining safe, inclusive classroom settings. Consequently, teachers implement school-specific lessons that include effective behavioral and instructional strategies to support students in both their learning and personal development. The strategic alignment of these structures and combined efforts of all members of the school community result in positive personal accomplishments and successful learning experiences for all students. This is evidenced in the positive results of a mock school survey, increased writing related to students' successful experiences posted on bulletin boards, and a sharp decrease of 80% fewer superintendent suspensions and 75% fewer principal suspensions.
- The instructional cabinet sets clear goals that are informed by data, resulting in improved classroom practice that positively impacts learning outcomes. (3.1)
 - The focus on strengthening teacher development, aligning units of study to the Common Core Standards, infusing college and career readiness skills across subjects, and accelerating learning for all students, serve as a framework in setting school goals. The instructional cabinet uses a data tracker regularly to ensure that students are progressing toward meeting grade-level goals and course benchmarks. For example, during the fall term, the information on the data tracker indicated that fewer than 25% of the students were meeting grade benchmarks in the area of vocabulary skills. As a follow up, the school implemented a "Word Up"

initiative which highlights specific academic vocabulary on a weekly basis, encouraging students to define, illustrate and use the designated vocabulary words across subjects, both verbally and in written form. Students' frequency and use of the vocabulary word of the week is tracked by staff and reinforced with incentives that motivate creative ways to incorporate the academic vocabulary into their daily experiences. Bulletin boards display the word of the week along with its definition and examples of how the word is used in context and integrated across subjects. As a result, the use of academic vocabulary has increased in students' daily reading and writing work products as noted in 85% of the students meeting grade benchmarks in the vocabulary portion of the Acuity instructionally targeted assessments administered in December.

- The administrative cabinet uses Teachboost, an online supervisory tool, to capture and review formal and informal feedback based on visits to classrooms. The data helps identify areas of strength and weaknesses in teaching practices in order to customize sessions on topics related to the Danielson framework. Based on teacher data derived from walkthroughs, class visits and teacher feedback, school leaders focus on classroom culture, designing coherent instruction, questioning and discussion techniques and assessments, in alignment with the citywide instructional expectations (CIE). The data available on Teachboost helps supervisors track the development of teachers' skills across each of these areas and supports teachers in revising their goals so that they are on track toward improving instructional practices and increasing student learning outcomes. As a result, supervisors gain a clear understanding of the development of teaching practices across the school as illustrated in bar graphs and color-coded charts created from the data generated by the Teachboost system.
- The school aligns curricula to key standards and offers meaningful learning experiences that promote rigor to improve student learning. (1.1)
 - School leaders, instructional leads and network content specialists revise, evaluate and strengthen curriculum maps during cabinet and teacher team meetings to ensure alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). In English language arts (ELA), teacher teams regularly engage in norming activities. These activities help determine text complexity and identify appropriately rigorous academic tasks and grade level instructional resources to support the school's key standards connected to narrative, informative and argumentative writing genres. In math, the analysis of fall benchmark assessments prompted teams to revise curriculum maps and academic tasks to include additional activities to increase math fluency and more practice with word problems requiring multiple steps. As a result, Acuity post assessments in math reflect an increase of up to 30% performance gains across grades. Additionally, the school's Progress Report indicates positive trends in closing the achievement gap.
 - The school offers an accelerated rigorous honors curriculum in math, science and foreign language for high performing students in grade 8, which provides a strong base and effective preparation for high school Regents credit. A cohort of students in grades 7 and 8 participate in a Science and Technology Entry Program on Saturdays at New York City College where they are exposed to post secondary programs in math,

science, technology and health-related professions. As part of the program, students acquire time management skills, engage in rigorous academic courses that reinforce critical thinking skills, and benefit from early college awareness and planning for post secondary education. Students in grades 6, 7 and 8 participate in after school programs and extended day sessions which support academic achievement and promote engagement through rich literacy-based activities, sports and the arts. As a result, Fall term courses indicate that 80% of the students received a passing grade in ELA, 85% in math and 80% in science and social studies courses.

- School leaders evaluate the effectiveness of instructional practices with a clear focus on promoting professional growth and reflection, thereby impacting classroom instruction. (4.1)
 - School leaders use the Teachboost online system, which incorporates the competencies and critical attributes that are part of the Danielson framework. Teachboost enables supervisors to track and monitor teachers' development across the domains they are focusing on this year, which include creating a positive classroom culture, designing coherent curricula, enhancing questioning and discussion techniques, and using assessment to drive instruction. The system is used to document and access notes from classroom visits, lesson observations and student data, thereby facilitating timely feedback to teachers regarding their strengths, areas of weakness and next steps to support the development of their teaching skills. Consequently, the information facilitates conversations that support teachers in revising and tracking their professional goals. The information also assists school leaders in planning professional development and differentiating support for new teachers. Teachers indicate that supports such as scheduled class intervisitations, co-planning with instructional leads and attending specific professional development sessions based on feedback to meet their individual needs have resulted in improved instructional practice, thus positively impacting student learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine teaching practices based on data so that purposeful lessons fully challenge all students and result in improved learning outcomes. (1.2)
 - The design and implementation of coherent units of study across all subjects and clear expectations for teaching as outlined in the Danielson Framework support the school's beliefs in promoting an in-depth and active learning process for all students. Lesson plans incorporate reference to Webb's Depth of Knowledge rubrics and a wide range of useful scaffolds, which include questions of varied complexity, graphic organizers, and sentence prompts to activate thinking and provide multiple entry points to lessons. However, lesson extensions consisted of assigning additional work to higher performing students, and scaffolds for high needs students and English language learners, including graphic organizers and turn and talk prompts, did not strategically set up all learners for high levels of participation. This limits the range of learning opportunities that would enable these students to work to their full potential. As a result, some students are not always motivated to fully

participate in discussions that foster higher levels of thinking and maximize their learning.

- Strengthen assessment practices to reflect effective feedback resulting in strategic adjustments to instruction and clear next learning steps to accelerate student learning. (2.2)
 - The school uses exit and entrance slips, rubrics, and common assessments aligned to key standards to determine student progress toward benchmarks across classes and grades. A wide range of assessment data is available in teachers' electronic assessment notebooks (TAN) and in the school's data tracker. However, the assessment information is not consistently used across all classrooms to strategically inform effective revisions to lessons to target the specific learning deficits of students. In addition, the use of student self-assessments are not common practices across classrooms and checks for understanding consist mostly of information gathered from exit slips. As a result, adjustments to lessons as noted in lesson plans, do now activities and feedback noted on student work, do not consistently provide detailed next steps that are clearly understood by students to improve their learning, thereby limiting opportunities to accelerate their learning potential.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: School of Humanities	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			X				
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?		X					
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?			X				
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X				
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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				
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed