

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**New Horizons**

**Middle School K442**

**317 Hoyt Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11231**

**Principal: Deanna Sinito**

**Dates of review: November 8 - 9, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Anita Skop**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

New Horizons is a middle school with 174 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 39% Black, 52% Hispanic, 8% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 41% special education students. Boys account for 59% of the students enrolled and girls account for 41%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 90.3%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is well developed.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- A rich, project based curriculum, deeply aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards across all grade and content areas, provides challenging educational experiences for all students including subgroups. (1.1)
  - Serving as a third year Common Core Learning Standards pilot school, MS 442 has fully aligned all areas of the curriculum at all grade levels to state standards and the citywide instructional shifts, including a strong focus on “advancing questions” in all content areas, including science, social studies and math. Curriculum maps reflect standards addressed and task assessments that require rigorous high order thinking skills and promote college and career readiness. Teacher created tasks have been accepted into the Common Core Library and the school has been featured on Channel 13 for its work with the Common Core. The strength of this alignment is not only evident in curriculum maps, but also in what is taught in every classroom of this completely Integrated Collaborative Teaching (ICT) school. For example, in math teachers routinely use targeted “advancing questions” to push students to explain their strategies and further their thinking, rather than simply providing defined protocols that produce a correct answer. As a result, all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, are engaged in challenging tasks with high expectations and must routinely demonstrate their thinking and provide evidence to support assertions. This is exemplified by improved achievement on New York State assessments, and an A in performance on the most current Progress Report.
- The school’s firmly embedded belief that all students grow from high quality instruction is seen in exemplary teacher pedagogy that engages students in developing independent learning skills through high quality supports. (1.2)
  - Protocols that support the school’s inherent philosophy are seen in every classroom and at every grade level. Though the school has significant numbers of students with disabilities in every class, it is difficult to identify these students. Classes engage all students in cognitively demanding tasks assignments and provide a range of entry points that reflect deep teacher understanding of every student and ongoing re-evaluation of needs. For example, in the school’s Autism Spectrum Disorder class, a group of students (not defined by their classification but by their need) worked with whiteboards and were encouraged to diagram their work with math problems to demonstrate their understanding. In another class in accelerated science, which also included students with disabilities, stations were arranged for a series of experiments on Newton’s laws. Students were grouped by need and assigned to begin with the station that addressed this need as their first rotation. There they were able to strengthen their understanding through teacher support before moving on to the next station. Further, push-in English language learner support ensured that students were able to participate in the same challenging assignments through the additional entry point of greater teacher modeling and translation. This careful attention to multiple entry points

enabled all students to demonstrate a deep understanding of Newton's laws as evidenced by verbal discussions, response to questioning and written observations from their experiments. It has also resulted in higher levels of student success as measured by unit assessments and daily formative assessments across all classes and grades.

- Student work routinely indicates both knowledge of content, independence and ownership of learning. Teachers challenge students to be accountable as learners and work to develop this independence. During an English language arts class, all students engaged in "Socratic Seminar." Rather than utilize the "traditional fishbowl" style protocol where some students talk and others watch, all students worked in small groups with a student leader and a recorder. In every group, all students self-facilitated and developed their own questions, consistently following a well embedded protocol that allowed all voices to be heard. They were then required to self evaluate their questions in terms of the success in generating evidence based discussion, while co-teachers judiciously circulated and recorded notes on the needs and strengths of the students. In another class, students provided peer feedback to their partners during writer's workshop. Partners were changed from previous pairings to enable each student to get a fresh perspective. Students reflected on the impact of their comments and the importance of providing meaningful feedback. As one student commented, "How is this (my comment) going to help you improve your writing?" Consequently, students are highly motivated and willing to take risks, and student work and discussion consistently indicate higher order thinking and active engagement.
- The deeply reflective use of all school resources, strategically aligned to the school's goals and the Common Core focus, has enhanced student achievement as indicated by improved outcomes on state assessments. (1.3)
  - School leaders astutely and creatively target every resource towards improving student achievement and school wide goals, in line with the citywide instructional expectations. Academic and socio-emotional student needs are prioritized through one-to-one mentoring, replacing the previous advisories and enhancing the respectful tone of the building, after a school developed survey of students and teachers indicated that this did not provide sufficient individualized support for students. Budgetary priorities also include a Teacher College staff developer for professional development, paid planning time after school and several split positions that enable this small school to have the services of a part time dean who also serves as the foreign language instructor. Every teacher has been given an IPAD, enhancing teacher ability to work collaboratively and enabling teachers to utilize specified applications to track student achievement. This has also deepened the accountability and transparency of the work of teacher teams. Further, a wide range of grants and partnerships has enabled the school to install a green roof, refurbish a science lab and provide enhanced extracurricular experiences such as chess and theater for students. As a result, rubric driven student writing, reflective work products from all content areas, consistently indicate that the student population has shown significant academic growth, and a commitment to high expectation and constant improvement is the vision shared school wide.

- Careful attention is paid to teacher hiring and assignments in this wholly ICT school. School leaders and department heads interview perspective employees who are asked to conduct a model lesson. Teachers are expected to share in the school's philosophy, which requires that all teachers in the context of team teaching support all students. Teams are seen as a "marriage." Strong teams are split and seeded to spread the quality of work by partnering with new teachers or others in need of support. Placement is also thoughtfully addressed. Reflecting on outstanding levels of growth on the New York State English Language Arts and math assessments in grade seven last year, the seventh grade teachers were "looped" teachers to eighth grade. This move has already shown success on student assessments and in the knowledge teachers have of their students. For example, strategically grouped students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, engaged in a math task that required them to recommend a new car for the principal to purchase. Analyzing a variety of factors, students conducted research and presented a written argument supporting their recommendation. A unit assessment indicated that the vast majority of students demonstrated solid mastery. However, teachers then studied student work intensely and determined that despite the unit's success, more information needed to be front-loaded for some students. This level of reflection is indicative of a school staff strongly committed to improving their pedagogy and increasing student success.
- Daily formative assessments and ongoing checks for understanding provide teachers with the data to identify student learning needs, quickly adjust instruction and support improved student mastery. (2.2)
  - Teachers routinely develop and utilize a range of formative assessments at the classroom level to evaluate student comprehension. For example, teachers confer with all students in all content areas making notes on mastery sheets or checklists. Annotated rubrics and work with meaningful teacher comments enable students to recognize next steps, spurring constant growth. Exit slips and ongoing checks for understanding also provide data that is used to redefine groups and make effective adjustments on a daily and sometimes immediate basis as was seen in one class where the teachers called specific students to work with them in different parts of the room during the lesson. In addition, this data is entered into an electronic grading system that serves to track student progress. Students are consistently asked to assess their work and that of their classmates to support deep levels of understanding and ownership. Furthermore, teachers deepen student understanding through continuous and meaningful questioning and students are asked to evaluate the success of their own questions and processes. For these reasons, students are able to clearly state their specific goals and next steps and teachers are able to address these next steps in an extremely timely manner, consistently improving student growth.
- School leaders, endorsement by staff, effectively utilize a research-based framework to appraise teacher practice and provide focused professional development resulting in elevated school-wide instructional practices. (4.1)
  - The school is part of the Teacher Effectiveness Pilot and serves as a network lab site that has deeply embedded the use of the research based

framework into all aspects of teacher reflection. Short, frequent observation cycles provide immediate, effective feedback to teachers through e-mails and one-to-one conversations. Observations are shared among administrators to norm their expectations for teacher practice. New teachers are so well supported by mentors and colleagues that it is virtually impossible to identify any of the school's eight new staff members. Teachers eagerly seek out administrative support and are provided with mentoring, low inference transcripts, intervisitations, peer video review, as well as targeted professional development from the staff developer and network personnel. Frequent surveys gauge teacher feedback, the success of their supports and further define their needs. Work with the framework is also incorporated into the work of the inquiry teams; teachers analyze aspects of their instruction to determine what must be further developed to move students. One teacher queried, "If my students do not understand this topic, what do I have to do differently?" This cements the connection between pedagogy and student progress, and has resulted in a culture where ongoing professional growth is the norm, teachers are highly self-reflective, and consistently praise their support. To quote one new teacher, "Inquiry makes me think about education in a way that I didn't know existed before I came here."

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Expand systems used to more purposefully assess the use of organizational resources and parental outreach in sharing the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards to enhance the pace of student achievement. (5.1)
  - School leaders and staff members have protocols in place that support parental outreach. Student mentors speak to parents weekly and parent workshops, through the diligent work of the parent coordinator, share the increased expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards. Furthermore, the new Parents Association is committed to increasing levels of school-wide interaction and outreach. However, though the administration continuously reviews the success of these endeavors as to attendance and parental response, levels of parental involvement have not yet significantly increased. Consequently, in-depth understanding of the impact of the Common Core Learning Standards, though deeply embedded school-wide is not as clearly understood by all parents, hindering their impact on student growth.
  - The work with inquiry at MS 442 is firmly embedded in the fabric of the school. All teams utilize the inquiry process including grade level teams and department teams. Teams consistently use an action research protocol to appraise student work and use this appraisal to define student needs and target instructional changes. In addition, teams are facilitated by teacher leaders and all minutes and agendas are shared with the administration, as well as school wide on professional development half days and through a newsletter. This protocol, as well as administrative visits to team meetings enables the administration to actively reflect on the work of teacher teams. However, reflection by grade level teams focuses on a smaller target population than that of department level teams. This somewhat limits the grade teams from defining trends as quickly as the department teams. As a result, responses to trends are less timely, impeding the speed of increased mastery of the CCLS.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: New Horizons Middle School	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score				X			
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<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			
<b>School Culture</b>							
<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			
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<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 <b>inquiry approach</b> 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				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>