

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**Mahalia Jackson**

**Elementary School - Middle School 123**

**300 West 140<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York  
NY 10030**

**Principal: Dr. Beverly Lewis**

**Dates of review: December 11 – 12, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Mahalia Jackson is an elementary-middle school with 676 students from prekindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 60% Black, 35% Hispanic, 3% White, 1% Asian, and 1% other students. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 90.3%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school is a safe place which cultivates effective partnerships and students appreciate the high level of support they receive that fosters their personal and academic development. (1.4 )
  - Students readily embrace the school's theme "College is not a dream, it's the plan" and all efforts to support students' needs are guided by this unifying mission which supports the school's goals. A deep sense of trust and respect permeates the entire school community. Students and parents appreciate that they can turn to teachers, the guidance counselor and social workers to help resolve personal issues and concerns that interfere with learning. A review of incident and suspension reports encouraged school personnel to apply for the Achievement Mentoring Program which is coordinated by Princeton Center for Leadership Training and focused on assisting school personnel with developing prevention strategies and student incentives. Progress notes on individual students in the program show good outcomes. This initiative, in addition to the Big Brother, Big Sister mentoring program, meets the social-emotional needs of students and has resulted in a substantial decline in suspension rates especially at the middle school level. Grades six to eight class representatives serve on the Principal's Advisory Council and provide advice and feedback to the principal on school policies and events. Additionally, select students facilitate school level presentations, edit and publish the student newspaper, as well as create online portfolios with the assistance of staff from one of the school's partnerships. Students also deliver morning announcements to their peers with a daily college advisement message. Their input has led to specific "dress down" days, a cleanliness campaign and they are presently providing feedback to school administrators on ways to foster student engagement in the classroom. Such active participation in shaping school wide decisions helps to support the development of leadership skills and bolster students' self-esteem as evidenced by classroom visits and conversations with students.
  - The school's Pupil Personnel Committee meets each Wednesday. Staff know individual students by name and have developed close confidential relationships with a number of students. The school's partnership with Graham Windham coordinates well with school based support structures to address the social-emotional needs of students and their families. Students who receive homework help and tutoring are demonstrating better academic success in class. Attendance team members have developed a laser-like focus when reviewing attendance data. Noted trends result in focused interventions and rewards such as home visits, phone calls, assemblies and student recognition on bulletin boards. Individually targeted students are meeting with greater academic success as noted in their work folders since they now avail themselves of in-school and after school support structures. These targeted efforts resulted in the overall annual attendance growth from eighty eight to ninety percent as well as a notable decrease in the number of tardy students and a decline in the referral rate to citywide agencies.

- School leaders develop and share clearly articulated goals with the school community to support social-emotional growth and foster student learning. (3.1)
  - The principal's performance objectives and school goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) focused on increasing student proficiency levels in English language arts and math align with school level action plans. The principal and cabinet members plan for the school year by reviewing outcomes from state assessment data as well as the results of the School Survey and Progress Report. Goals are tracked and adjustments, (such as the hiring of three part-time teachers to support the developed goals in the Response to Intervention initiative), made to address students' needs.
  - School members help shape the school's goals which then are shared with teachers and families via the staff and parent handbooks. The school community is cognizant of and embraces the School Improvement Plan. Teachers set class goals in the lower grades. At the upper grade level students set their own broad learning goals and are encouraged to be accountable for their own learning. The staff has developed a list of struggling students as well as those requiring enrichment, resulting in targeted assistance during the day and afterschool. As such, there is a shared accountability resulting in commitment to needed improvements noted in the school's goals.
- School staff are developing practices to analyze data to provide them with a view of student performance resulting in interventions to positively impact achievement. (2.2 )
  - Teachers use conference notes, teacher prepared tests and design their own writing and math benchmark assessments to gauge student understanding of the taught curricula. Teachers are beginning to develop assessments aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). In one eighth grade ELA class several students used evidence from the text to explain the difference between implicit and explicit opinions and in one seventh grade social studies class students gave oral presentations after conducting short research projects and explicitly cited specific aspects of the standards. As such, students, especially those in middle grades, are becoming cognizant of the connections between tasks and the expectations espoused by the CCLS. Teachers utilize rubrics and some are beginning to align written feedback on students' work with the specific rubric being used in order to note students' strengths and needs. Consequently, teachers are developing ways to understand students' assessment results relative to select standards with the goal of increased student outcomes.
  - Assessment results including student work products are reviewed by grade level teams. Some teams create common assessments and are learning how to use them in order to measure progress toward specific goals. Teachers note that there are students who do not perform well on paper and pencil tests and so they are beginning to develop a variety of assessments including presentations and public speaking to further

assess student learning. As such, teachers are beginning to formulate specific action plans to address student needs.

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

- Develop teaching strategies to support practices that encourage and demonstrate deep thinking so that all students are fully engaged in their learning. (1.2)
  - Some teachers prepare lessons that target the specific needs and strengths of students and employ strategies that address a range of student ability levels. This however, is not the practice in every class; therefore not all students receive the academic support necessary to accelerate their learning. Additionally, although students sit in groups, teachers do not always use formative data to make assignments or to develop appropriately challenging tasks. As such, most teachers do not yet plan lessons that demonstrate sufficient engagement in higher order thinking so that meaningful work products demonstrate activities that stretch the thinking of all learners including English language learners, students with individual education plans and those performing at the highest achievement levels.
  - Teachers are beginning to employ open-ended questions to spark discussions and students in some classrooms are questioning each other's assumptions and ideas. However, this is not consistent; in many classrooms questions and answers are most often between teacher and individual student. Consequently, thought-provoking questions, conversations that give students the chance to support their views with evidence, change their minds and use questions as a way to learn more, are not yet the norm across grades.
- Build upon the teacher observation and feedback process to ensure effective feedback and closer alignment to the common teaching framework to elevate teaching practices. (4.1)
  - School leaders share verbal comments and a researched based tool is used to provide informal written feedback. However, next steps are not consistently aligned to the tool, and feedback is not suitably effective as it doesn't cite evidence from student work, instructional practices or other data sets. As such, at times, teachers do not receive actionable feedback. This results in missed opportunities to accelerate teacher growth and student outcomes.
  - Teachers participate in external and internal professional development opportunities. However school leaders do not yet consistently use observation data and teacher input to drive professional development opportunities. Consequently, they are missed opportunities to help teachers achieve optimal levels of performance and reach their own personal goals and impact student learning.

- Further refine the development of the curriculum to reflect alignment with key standards and Common Core learning tasks that increase rigor and cognitively engage all learners. (1.1)
  - Although academic tasks at times emphasize higher order skills, tasks are not consistently rigorous enough to challenge students performing at varied ability levels especially students in self-contained special education classes. School leaders and staff embrace the support from consultants and network team members who help them make changes to the curricula to integrate CCLS into English language arts and math units of study. This is a work in progress as teacher teams continue to make further adjustments regarding the balance of informational and literary texts across a range of disciplines. Texts are not always sequenced to build knowledge about specific topics and subjects and tasks are not always adequately challenging for the grade, resulting in an achievement gap across multiple levels.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Mahalia Jackson	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>		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>