

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School

Elementary School 318

276 West 151 Street

New York

NY 10039

Principal: Dawn Brooks- DeCosta

Dates of review: January 23 – 24, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School is an elementary school with 216 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 92% Black, 6% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian. The student body includes 0% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 92.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

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)
 - A warm, cozy area on the school's third floor equipped with a rug, sofa, pictures, and books, known as the *meditation corner*, embodies the safe culture evident throughout the entire building. The principal indicates that students frequently utilize the space as a sanctuary where they can retreat if they feel the need for a few quiet moments. Students state that "TMA feels like family" and it is quite apparent that all efforts to support students' needs are guided by a unifying mission supportive of 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 character building/student services coordinator, and the parent coordinator, to help resolve personal issues and concerns that interfere with learning. Students recite the school creed daily while specific character traits such as respect, leadership, and responsibility are embedded in monthly interdisciplinary units and depicted through reference to the lives of leaders and artists. For example, in the month of January, pride was aligned with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the leader of the month, and Jacob Lawrence the artist of the month. To foster a sense of pride in the community, all classes are named after a historical figure or Harlem neighborhood, such as Langston Hughes or Strivers Row, respectively. A review of incident reports encouraged school personnel to develop a partnership with the Respect Institute whose personnel work specifically with fifth grade staff focused on assisting school personnel with developing disciplinary prevention strategies and student incentives. A young women and young men's collaborative serve to support gender specific initiatives and progress notes on individual students in the program show good outcomes. This initiative has resulted in a decline in incidents, especially at the upper grade level. Additionally, class representatives from grades 2 to 5 serve on the student council and, on a weekly basis, provide advice and feedback to the principal on school policies and events. Student Council members, easily identified by their yellow and white shirts, serve as student ambassadors during school-wide events. They recently conducted a survey and their analysis of the results revealed that the second lunch period was more disruptive than the first. Students determined that this lunch period needed more structure and was too crowded. As a result, they wrote a persuasive letter to a specific class suggesting that they move to the first lunch period. After consensus was received from the greater majority of the school community, the change was effectuated, which resulted in a better functioning cafeteria. Their input has also led to specific spirit days, such as pajama day. Such active participation in shaping school wide decisions helps to support their 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 weekly. One parent shared her amazement that the principal and school staff know individual students by name and that they have developed close confidential relationships with a number of students. The school's partnership with Abyssinian Development (ADC), the RUSH Foundation, Harlem School of the Arts, Lehman College Math Project, the Metro Manhattan LINKS, and The After School Corporation (TASC), coordinates well with school based support structures to address the social-emotional and academic needs of students and their families. The school was awarded an Extended Learning Time (ELT) grant and is recognized as a national model site. As a result, the school day ends at 5:00 PM. Schools from a number of states visit to observe the integration of the many varied academic and enrichment electives such as African drumming, theater, music, and ELA and math tutoring. Students who receive homework help and tutoring are demonstrating better academic success in class with increased levels noted on unit tests. The Character Building Coordinator is presently supporting a group of students who were displaying difficulty making and maintaining friendships. As a result of the success of this "Friends Group," complaints of bullying have reduced to only one thus far this school year. Additionally, attendance team members utilize 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 as they now avail themselves of in-school and after-school support structures. These targeted efforts result in monthly class and grade attendance increases, an overall school attendance rate of 92%, as well as a notable decrease in the number of tardy students and a decline in the referral rate to Citywide agencies.
- The school effectively communicates with families who have high praise for the academic and personal support their children receive, resulting in productive home-school partnerships that support student success. (3.4)
 - The administrative team, through faculty conferences and weekly cabinet and planning meetings, consistently communicate a high instructional focus. Teacher teams are granted tremendous autonomy and teacher leaders prepare and share meeting minutes and agendas with the administrative team. These leaders indicate that their ability to have a voice in shaping curricula and instructional decisions contributes to their leadership growth and sense of empowerment. Additionally, all staff welcome the training provided by their peers as well as network personnel. The continuous and transparent cycle of support creates high levels of individual and team accountability leading to improved teaching practices and student learning, as evidenced by classroom visits and student work products.
 - Letters of recognition, academic awards, progress reports, literacy and math fairs, and student assemblies are but a small sample of the myriad of ways high expectations are communicated to families and students. Staff members facilitate workshops on the middle school application and articulation process. Additionally, school staff and families coordinate the annual "college day" in the spring. Staff and parents wear their college jerseys and share high school, career, and college preparedness tips so that students better understand the expected rigorous demands when

they leave elementary school. These activities result in middle school visits and a heightened awareness of colleges and careers to which Students may not have been previously exposed. For example, one fifth grade student remarked that for her “success is getting the highest grades, everyone going to college, getting a good job and being a good role model.” As such, during their respective meetings, parents and students reported heightened awareness and students’ increased aspirations for college enrollment and high-level careers.

- Analysis of a variety of student performance data provide administrators with a view of the school’s strengths and weaknesses and results in interventions to positively impact school performance. (2.2)
 - Teachers use assorted streams of data including conference notes, rubric scores, and teacher prepared tests, as well as design their own writing and math CCLS aligned benchmark assessments to gauge student understanding of the taught curricula. In one first grade class, students create real world number stories and solve and explain their understanding of specific math concepts while in a third grade class, the teacher helped students uncover their own answers with skillful open-ended higher level questioning and the use of appropriate content language. As such, students are becoming cognizant of the connections between tasks and the expectations espoused by the CCLS. Teachers utilize rubrics to provide written feedback on students’ work noting students’ strengths and next steps. Consequently, teachers are demonstrating ways of understanding students’ assessment results relative to select standards with the focus on increased student outcomes as noted in assessment binders.
 - In addition to using common rubrics, grade level teams also create common assessments that are used to identify strengths and needs, as well as promote ongoing conversation and reflection. Subsequently, the principal and teachers use these results, including student work products, to measure student progress toward specific goals and to make needed changes to the curricula. Individual plans are created for students after results are reviewed every six weeks. Additionally, teachers hold data talks with specific students each Friday in order to review their goals, note progress made, and develop next steps. The school is the recipient of a \$10,000 Assessment Practice Grant (APG), which is used to provide professional development support to teachers on how data analysis leads to changes in curricula and instructional practices with noted tangible results in student performance. For example, a grade 4 teacher created charts listing the names of students who were either “developing” or “meeting” expectations after reviewing assessment results aligned to specific skills and strategies. The teacher then shared changes to her instructional practices such as requiring students to cite specific evidence to support their claims both verbally and in writing. As such, teachers formulate specific action plans to address student needs.
- The principal makes thoughtful organizational decisions around teacher assignments and use of staff and student time in alignment with school goals to support improved student work. (1.3)

- The principal focuses much effort to ensure that the school's leased building has wireless access throughout all classrooms so that, laptops and other instructional technology can be and are now in full use across grades and subjects. To further support teachers' pedagogic growth, time has been allotted every Thursday enabling select teacher teams to share practices and strategies with the entire school community. Presentations that revolve around assessment, goal setting, and analysis of student work, or common core strategies, enriches the professionalism across the school community, which is at a high level. The principal's budgeting, coupled with staff input, result in the strategic use of resources that are aligned to the school's four instructional goals: increased student performance in ELA and math, engaging students in Common Core aligned tasks, and developing teachers' instructional practices. Additionally, the newly hired ELT coordinator ensures a seamless transition from the school day to the after-school focused enrichment activities facilitated by all of the school's partners. Trips are carefully aligned to units of study and, as a result, student learning is enhanced and solidified.
- The hiring committee is presently inactive since, for the past three years, teacher stability has been at a high level in the school. The principal strategically moves staff across grades, as evidenced by a second grade teacher looping with her class to the third grade, which helped to effectuate a smooth transition and seamless year-to-year continuity for these students. Additionally, the inquiry and grade level teams target specific groups of students, including the lowest third and higher achieving students, resulting in targeted assistance during the day and afterschool, and tracking logs reflect the growth of these identified students on the most recent formative assessment results. After a review of data revealed a noted decline on State assessments for students with individual educational plans, the SETSS teacher now pushes in to classrooms to provide seamless support for these students. This not only results in a smaller student to teacher ratio, but ensures that students do not miss critical course work, increases the shared level of accountability to accelerate student growth, and is conducive to optimal levels of student personal success.

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)
 - Teachers prepare lessons that target the specific needs and strengths of students and employ strategies that address a range of student ability levels. To meet students' needs, teachers use scaffolding tools such as graphic organizers and manipulatives to support writing and math. However, although students cite text to support their answers, some student work products do not yet reflect suitable immersion in a unit of study by employing research strategies across multiple sources. As such, some teachers' lesson plans miss out on demonstrating strategies to sufficiently engage students in higher order thinking so that all work products and activities stretch the thinking of all learners, including

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, in a few classrooms, questions and answers still remain 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 further learning, are not yet the norm across classes and grades.
- Further refine the development of the curriculum to reflect alignment with key standards and Common Core learning tasks so that there is increased rigor and all students are cognitively engaged. (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. 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, and teacher teams continue to make further adjustments regarding the balance of informational and literary texts across a range of disciplines. However, texts chosen for the teaching of specific units do not include higher-leveled materials, thus precluding more advanced students from broadening their knowledge base. Additionally, related tasks do not build in relevant challenge and rigor, thus precluding some students from achieving at even higher levels.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School	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