

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Washington Heights Academy

Elementary School 366

**202 SHERMAN AVE
MANHATTAN
NY, 10034**

Principal: Renzo Martinez

Dates of review: January 30 - 31, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Elsa Nunez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Washington Heights Academy is an elementary school with 389 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 1% Black, 91% Hispanic, 5% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 21% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 94.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is Proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's inclusive and nurturing environment effectively supports the academic and social development of students and adults. (1.4)
 - .Essential to the academic success of students, the school's strong belief around meeting students' social and emotional needs is evidenced by the development of meaningful relationships among staff, parents, and students, enabling collaborative support of school wide goals. The school's motto "PS 366 ROCKS", (Respect, Organization, Caring, Knowledge, and Safety), sets the tone for an orderly and welcoming environment and behavior expectations throughout the school. The school has adopted the Positive Behavior Intervention System and trained key staff members in Responsive Classroom protocols to solidify behavior expectations and promote a common understanding. Students set academic and personal development goals, which are revised throughout the school year, so that improvement plans promote self-monitoring of learning. Academic progress that is carefully monitored by the school's child study team informs interventions and supports needed by students. Student input is encouraged through the student council and student leadership groups, such as the safety patrol, thus developing students who are vested in school goals. As a result of the student council's proposal, recess activities were reorganized to include a greater variety of activities. The principal's open door policy allows staff, students, and parents, to provide and receive feedback regarding school policies and improvement efforts. In addition, parental input is solicited through parent association meetings, curriculum nights, school leadership team meetings, and workshops. Parental input led to additional after-school and arts programs such as The Young Peoples Chorus, which resulted in students performing at Carnegie Hall. Teachers and parents express a high level of satisfaction with the school's efforts to promote student progress as evidenced by results on the Learning Survey and parents' comments such as "Parents love the sense of a close knit family" that the school promotes.
- Effective analysis of student data allows administrators and teachers to identify areas of strength and improvement to adjust curricular and instructional decisions. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams' development of grade level rubrics to assess student progress towards meeting key standards that include asking and answering questions to demonstrate understanding of key ideas and reading and writing informational texts, focuses on adequately preparing students for the demands of the Common Core Standards. Across grades, student work is assessed using grade-level rubrics to develop a common understanding of strengths and areas in need of improvement of individual and groups of students in order to provide targeted assistance. Results of student assessments discussed during teacher teams lead to revised teaching plans and developing scaffolds to support student needs. The impact of this work is evidenced by the implementation of guided reading groups, the explicit teaching of strategies to read and write for information, and differentiated tasks and graphic organizers for lower grades enabling teachers to meet the mid-year reading level goals set for the early childhood grades.
 - .As a result of analysis of early childhood assessments, the school realized phonics and fluency in the early grades needed to be strengthened. Consequently, the Reading Reform program is now being implemented in the lower grades. Teachers also use results of analysis of data to revise units of study in order to address identified needs. For example, the second and third

grade team realized that students were struggling with organization and as a result, subsequent units of study have a greater focus on this strategy so that students receive more explicit instruction to support their mastery of grade-level skills.

- The school data-driven focused goals are evident across all planning documents and drive school improvements efforts. (3.1)
 - The school's improvement efforts based on achievement data aims at enabling all students to thrive academically and socially. To that end the scheduling of multiple opportunities for teachers to collaborate in vertical and horizontal teacher team meetings that include support personnel, promotes coherent planning for the implementation of curricular units. Meeting with grade level lead teachers and continuous conversations with parents and staff, allow the principal to engage in meaningful data-based conversations with key stakeholders regarding progress towards school goals. The principal values Input from parents and staff, resulting in the implementation of additional after-school programming, greater focus in the content area of science, and the adoption of a new math curriculum, all aimed at addressing and meeting the school's goals to provide rigorous targeted instruction to improve student achievement.
 - The school analyzes a variety of data sources to monitor progress towards school goals. Close analysis of reading levels led to the re-assignment of English as second language teachers to provide greater assistance to teachers and students in grades kindergarten to second grade to help accelerate students to meet mid-year targets. Student achievement data is also used to plan professional development to assist teachers in helping students meet goals. Teachers who are provided with professional development through the school's literacy coach, consultants, and the Network, are supported in the implementation of the standards based curriculum to meet school improvement goals. This is evidenced by data driven planning for small group instruction, focus on asking higher order questions, and the purposeful use of language aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) to develop tasks.
- Systems for providing teachers with clear and actionable feedback as a result of cycles of observations effectively support teacher development. (4.1)
 - The school, in its second year as a pilot school with the Department's of Education teacher effectiveness program, is using Danielson's Teaching framework to improve teacher practice. Teachers receive verbal and written feedback to support individual as well as school wide goals. Teachers, after completing a self-assessment, set goals related to a particular competency in which they want to improve, and then share them with administrators to guide planning professional development. Administrators engage in frequent conversations with teachers regarding observations, provide feedback on ARIS learn, and set up targeted professional development by coaches and Network to support teacher development. As a result of feedback regarding the school wide focus on "Designing Coherent Instruction," one teacher indicated that she now "scrutinizes how lesson are planned, delivered, and the types of questions that she is asking." In addition, classroom observations indicate grade level planning focused on aligning instruction to the CCLS to further improve outcomes of all students.
 - Based on teacher observations, the principal has developed short- and long-term professional development goals to improve teacher practice with an eye towards planning scaffolds and rigorous tasks for all students. Differentiated observations tools used to observe teachers are based on staffs' level of expertise and experience thus assuring that teachers receive support based on specific needs. This process allows administrators to develop a clear picture of

the needs of individual staff members, and leads to the effective use of in-house resources such as coaches, English as second language teachers, other support personnel, outside consultants, and the Network, to meet the needs of teachers. Identifying experts within the school has also allowed the principal to foster leadership skills of key staff members and to promote the development of a cadre of highly trained professionals who support the school's mission, as evidenced by observations and interviews.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that the standards based curricula implemented across classrooms consistently engages all students in rigorous and challenging learning experiences in order to increase student performance. (1.1)
 - Teacher teams plan literacy units using the CCLS as a guide, with a focus on reading and writing for information and the support of arguments using textual evidence, as a way to prepare students to meet grade level expectations. Teacher teams compare the language of the CCLS to that of rubrics, tasks, and teaching points, so there is consistency in the language used across classrooms and grades. Teacher teams span two grade levels and include intervention personnel to assure that curricular units build upon key skills from grade-to-grade. The school has adopted a new math curriculum aligned to grade level math standards that focuses on key topics for each grade, and it aligns instruction to the Citywide instructional shifts. However, in literacy, teachers are still developing interdisciplinary units with a focus on explicit teaching and application of skills such as supporting key ideas with evidence from the text or developing questions to aid comprehension, and as a result teaching objectives and questioning inconsistently promote students in deeper exploration of content.
 - Teacher teams consistently use results of analysis of student work to develop and revise tasks to assure they are challenging, yet accessible to a variety of learners. Teachers carefully plan tasks by using Depth of Knowledge to engage learners at various levels of complexity. Teachers also analyze reading levels, end-of-unit exams, and results of standardized exams in literacy, math, and English language acquisition, to plan interventions for individual and groups of students to promote continued progress. Across classrooms, students are encouraged to use tiered word list to express ideas or questions to promote higher order discussion and thinking. However, teaching strategies and questioning are still not sufficiently scaffolded to engage all learners in higher order thinking.
- Develop greater consistency in the implementation of instructional strategies that support students at various levels, in order to maximize their learning opportunities. (1.2)
 - The school uses Danielson's rubric to reflect upon, strengthen, and deepen, instructional practices to support teachers in meeting the needs of students. The school's focus on the competencies of Designing Coherent instruction and Questioning Techniques is evident in common teaching objectives implemented across grades and look-fors around asking higher order questions. Also evident across classrooms is a print rich environment, differentiated learning objectives, and short- and long-term goal setting to support the learning needs of students. Students are provided with graphic organizers, word lists, sentence starters, and conversational prompts, to assist in reading and discussing difficult texts. Students are encouraged to use tiered word lists posted throughout classrooms to promote the use of complex vocabulary words during writing and discussion. Students are also provided with opportunities to collaborate on activities in small groups to support each other in strengthening skills. However, not all tasks and materials are

sufficiently differentiated to challenge and engage all students, including higher achieving students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Washington Heights Academy		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