

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy

Public School X236

**499 East 175th Street
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Beverly Ellis

Dates of review: March 18-19, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Dolores Esposito

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy 236X is an elementary school with 396 students from kindergarten through grade 3. The school population comprises 28% Black, 70% Hispanic, 1% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 24% 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 92.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has cultivated a highly supportive and inclusive culture that enhances the academic and personal development of their early childhood learners. (1.4)
 - The hallways and classrooms at The Langston Hughes Explorers Academy exhibit very positive interactions among adults, students and parents leading to a warm and nurturing environment that supports all members of the school community. A review of the school's data led the school to focus on developing coherent instruction as one of their goals. The staff and parents have embraced this work that is frequently discussed during the school's leadership team meetings and is positively impacting classroom instruction. As a result, teachers are implementing systems in their classrooms to better engage students during instruction through small interactive groups. Students are very excited to discuss a school initiative called CARS, "Cooperate, Act Responsible and Safety". Classes receive stars from anyone in the school when they exhibit these characteristics, which are then followed by an award or recognition. Parents feel supported by the school and participate in in-school celebrations for their children. In addition, the Positive Behavior Intervention System Council developed a matrix that focuses on positive behaviors that promote academic success with students, which has strengthened student voice thereby enhancing the positive and collaborative culture in the school.
 - The school has structures in place to ensure that students' social emotional learning needs are well met. The social worker, guidance counselor and parent coordinator work well as a team to support students regarding attendance, counseling, and behavioral interventions that support student success in the classrooms. As a result, there is improved communication between the staff and families further leading to improvements in attendance from 90.5% in September, 2013 to 92.6% to date. The school celebrates attendance through monthly assemblies and rewards the students and parents. Additionally, the school's most recent Learning Environment Survey reveals that the "safety and respect" category received the highest score resulting in a grade of "B".
- The principal effectively uses resources that are aligned to the school's goals and result in meaningful student work products. (1.3)
 - The principal continues to invest in consultants for literacy and math to support teacher pedagogy. In literacy, the school is focused on developing differentiated tasks that aim at improving reading and writing skills. As a result, teachers have incorporated clear structures for designing small group work through the Daily 5 Model, which enables students to have more meaningful choices within the literacy block. These choices allow students to explore reading independently, work with a buddy, work on the writing process and word work to build vocabulary. Many teachers also use smart-boards during their mini-lessons and then provide students with laptops, iPads, or computers in the classroom, as

one of their choices during small group instruction to emphasize writing skills and use visual supports to support the varied needs. Consequently, student writing shows the use of taught revision strategies and better use of vocabulary that is taught explicitly during the writing block, based on rubrics used to assess the work. Hence, there are more meaningful work samples evident in work folders and persuasive writing samples that were reviewed during classroom visits and teacher meetings. Additionally, staff time is structured effectively to enable grade teams to meet weekly. Teams work collaboratively to design lessons and units of study that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), especially in the third grade, which is new to the school this year. As a result, teacher practice is enhanced in the area of differentiation through the new school-wide structure of the Daily 5 Model.

- The leadership supports teacher development through regular cycles of classroom observations that promote professional growth and reflection. (4.1)
 - The administrative team developed a culture of risk-taking and trust that enables teachers to participate actively in their professional growth. Teachers receive on-going formal and informal feedback, which includes conversations about student data and work samples throughout the year. Feedback includes clear next steps regarding their practices using a research-based teaching framework. For example, the school focuses on questioning techniques and strategies for differentiation. These competencies are regularly discussed during staff and individual teacher meetings with administration and evident in written observations that were reviewed. Coaches and mentors provide targeted support to teachers in the areas of classroom management, differentiation and planning. Teachers share that this feedback provides them with clear guidance and support to improve their practices and development. As a result, teachers are showing growth on the research-based continuum for pedagogical improvement.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen the quality of academic tasks to effectively challenge all students and close the achievement gap. (1.1)
 - The school is developing strategies to make thoughtful decisions about integrating the CCLS but not yet on a school-wide basis. Teacher teams are working diligently to integrate CCLS expectations with their current curriculum during grade meetings. However, a review of the tasks during lessons does not consistently foster higher order thinking skills or student discussions. For example, teachers incorporate the Daily Five management system that allows students to work independently or in small groups during the literacy block, which fosters student independence. Teacher plans reflect the use of this management system during their literacy block. However, tasks, units and lessons currently lack the breadth and depth of content and processes that explicitly incorporate critical thinking skills consistently. Furthermore, during classroom visits, academic tasks generally focus on low-level activities without consistent opportunities for students to expand their thinking. Moreover, the third grade team, which is a new grade in the school, is

working collaboratively to explicitly incorporate key standards and skills that are Common Core-aligned across content areas. However, they are in the early stages of developing these curriculum units and lessons. Consequently, units and lessons do not provide rigorous opportunities for students to think critically and deeply about their work across all grades and content areas. As a result, student progress is uneven across the school, based on formative assessments that were shared by staff members.

- Strengthen teaching practices that provide access to rigorous curricula and academic tasks to improve student work products for all learners. (1.2)
 - The school incorporates a workshop model in all subject areas and a literacy framework to build and develop reading strategies through the “CAFÉ” that focuses on comprehension, accuracy, fluency and vocabulary. Teachers model strategies during the mini-lessons and provide various opportunities for students to practice skills that have been taught. However, most classrooms do not yet provide students with multiple points of entry during lessons or use a variety of complex texts with appropriate supports that scaffold student learning effectively. Teachers use and analysis of data is still developing and is supported by professional development. In some classrooms, teachers provide students with strategies that support or extend their learning, based on formative assessments. For example, during some math and literacy classrooms, students work in small groups and use manipulatives or checklists to guide them with tasks while other classrooms do not make use of checklists, rubrics or criteria charts that assist students with revising their work. In classrooms that organize learning opportunities with instructional tools that assist students with their learning, there was evidence of student engagement and meaningful conversations with their peers. However, across most classrooms, instruction does not incorporate higher order thinking skills and rich discussions that appropriately challenge students across content areas and grade levels. In turn, student work samples are inconsistent across grade levels in terms of content, quality and volume. Some classrooms have organized portfolios while others have folders with student worksheets reflecting varying levels of complexity. Therefore, differentiation is a school-wide focus that is developing across most classrooms. As a result, the current data for reading based on the school’s Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA) reveals that student reading levels are declining in some grades.
- Improve the use of common assessments to effectively adjust curriculum and instruction and monitor student progress. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams and individual teachers embrace the work regarding the use of common assessments that inform instruction. For example, this year they are using the I-Ready online assessment system to better understand student’s progress in reading and mathematics. During grade meetings they review this data but have not yet developed a full understanding of how to effectively use the assessments to make informed decisions during instruction. For example, the data reveals a decline in reading levels but teachers and staff are not able to pinpoint the gaps in reading and writing. Therefore, they are unable to effectively

target instruction during mini-lessons or small groups to support or extend student learning. During classroom visits, most students use common rubrics in writing, but are unable to explain how these tools help them to set goals and next steps. Furthermore, most teacher feedback provides limited opportunities for students to improve and is not consistent on student work samples across the school. Due to these inconsistencies in assessment practices, curriculum units and instructional practices are not effectively adjusted thus limiting student progress.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

| School name: Langston Hughes Young Explorers 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 |