

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**The Magnet School of Humanities**

**Middle School K347**

**35 Starr Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11221**

**Principal: Dr. John Barbella**

**Dates of review: May 28-29, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Andrea Harris**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The School of Humanities is a middle school with 392 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 10% Black and 88% Hispanic students, 1% White students, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 18% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012-2013 was 90.8%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school ensures that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and accessible for a variety of learners to provide all students with learning opportunities and engage them in deep reasoning. (1.1)
  - The school's teaching and learning community worked collaboratively during the summer months of, 2013 to make certain that the curriculum delivered in all content areas was CCLS aligned and focused on improving student thinking and discussion practices. Additionally, the teacher teams refined units from Expeditionary Learning and Connected Math Program-3 (CPM-3) to ensure the integration of the instructional shifts. Supports and scaffolds were incorporated into unit plans based on the data for students with disabilities and English language learners. To ensure coherency school leadership, coaches, and consultants and lead content area teachers monitored and revised unit plans based on school wide baseline data, mid-unit common assessments and unit assessments. As a result of these purposeful decisions to build coherency all students have appropriate opportunities to engage in learning that promotes college and career readiness.
  - Content area unit plans have been revised based on student summative and formative data to ensure that the work done by students will strengthen all students problem solving abilities. Tasks require students to engage in higher order thinking, as well as take ownership for culminating work products. For example, during the small group student meeting, students presented portfolios that contained samples of English language arts and math work. A student shared a "throw back Thursday" problem solving activity that had been created by his group for the class. It focused on sale items and challenged students on sale price, unit price and determining if something is really a good value when something is advertised for 30% off. A second student shared a written text that challenged student thinking because the student had to write an editorial assuming the role of Woodrow Wilson. In both tasks students were required to incorporate standard based writing into their work and take complete ownership through the presentation of their work using claims and counter claims. During the large team meeting teachers discussed how they constantly revise units and tasks based on student work. Each week two teachers rotate taking turns presenting work done by different students. This deep analysis of student work is inclusive of English language learners and special education students. Consequently, all learners can engage in deep analysis, and have access to challenging curricula.
- Across classrooms teachers analyze information on student learning outcomes and adjust instructional decisions based on a variety of curricula that are aligned to assessments. (2.2)
  - There is a wide range of assessments used in the school across content areas. Both horizontal and vertical teacher teams create common assessments that are based on summative and formative data and align with CCLS and the school wide grading policy. The grade 7 TIF team has collected a series of student anchor papers that serve as models for student responses to various math tasks.

Students work in partnerships using the anchor papers as guides when revising and critiquing their work. This practice provides students with the opportunity to be reflective while taking ownership for their work. This was evident during a visit to a grade 7 math class. Students used anchor papers as they worked on simplifying algebraic expressions. Earlier this year the vertical English language arts team members used baseline assessment data to identify the struggles students had with responding to “open ended questions”. This resulted in teachers working collaboratively creating rubrics that would be used to assess student writing when responding to questions of this type. The rubrics provided multiply entry points for all learners and enabled teachers to provide students with actionable feedback connecting student self-monitoring and achievement.

- Across classrooms common assessments are used to measure progress towards meeting teacher and student goals. These assessments come in various forms and provide multiple opportunities for teachers to monitor student learning. Task aligned rubrics are used by teacher teams to revise tasks to promote student thinking, participation and ownership of the work. Common assessment tools used by teachers during classroom visits in varied content areas ranged from entrance and exit slips to writing prompts, open ended questions, student to student discussions and short response quizzes which are all in efforts to enable teachers to make adjustments in their teaching as well as unit plans.
- Through mutual trust and respect the school community nurtures and supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults. (1.4)

The school community uses a cohesive approach consisting of embedded strategic practices supporting the academic and personal growth of its students. These practices have positioned school leaders, teachers, parents and students to work collaboratively building a culture that nurtures and promotes positive behavior among students and adults. Student council members shared that they meet with school leadership twice monthly. This provides opportunity for students’ to voice their opinion and impact school based decisions. Agendas are prepared by the students and serve as evidence and include topics, such as health, extra-curricular activities, preparing for high school and college opportunities. Students also shared that they worked with the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) planning a college tour trip for June, 2014. Parents also shared during their meeting that the school community is very proud of the work they do ensuring that every learner has daily positive learning experiences. The school’s Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) involves all staff, parents and student council members. The program collects data around student behavior that is analyzed and divided into two tiers. This helps to promote an inclusive culture and a common language amongst everyone. One approach to building this culture includes the use of incentives known as (U ROCKS) U refers to the student receiving the coupon, R-responsibility/respect, O-overcoming obstacles, C-citizenship, K-kindness and S-success coupons. Students can use these coupons in exchange for varying rewards. The rewards are selected by the student council and help to promote student voice. For example, students selected special pens, pencils, tee-shirts, sweat shirts and backpacks as incentives. Another example of student voice surfaced during the large group meeting of students as they shared how the art teacher and students from the art club came up with the idea to decorate the school using black electrical tape to create sculptures on the walls, thus this exhibit has resulted in students feeling their voice is welcome, and valued for the creativity and beauty they have brought to their building.

- The school's PBIS matrix has helped all constituents feel valued and significant at the school. Every student knows that there is an adult that they can connect with in the building. All adults serve as advisors to one or two students. During the parent meeting the group expressed that they feel they have access to school leadership and staff at all times. Families have numerous opportunities to engage in assembly programs, workshops and other events focused on character building and good citizenship. This helps families to be better prepared for helping their learners to be college and career ready. Each month the student council and the PBIS team select another character trait to focus on. This leads to specific lessons that are taught across content areas that include strategies used by both students and teachers to enhance learning and personal growth. During the large group student meeting it was shared that having opportunities to write, discuss and reflect about their behavior has supported them with making better choices when necessary. Each structure is aligned strategically to ensure success for all students. This is evidenced by student adult advisory matched with the most challenging students assigned to members on the school leadership. During the small group student meeting a student shared that his advisor was the assistant principal who is always there for him. He keeps me from making poor decisions and helps me focus on my work. "In my classes now I get 70's and 80's and before I was failing". "In this school the teachers really care about you and want you to go to college". The meticulous matching and embedded practices around maintaining a culture of trust among the constituents has resulted in a decrease in the number of suspensions as evidenced by the current decrease from 20 suspensions last year to 8 suspensions this year, as indicated on the OOR's report. The students and staff attribute this to implementation of the character building PBIS program.
- School leaders, faculty, parents and students have developed a community where the culture consistently communicates high expectations for all and provides families with the support to achieve those expectations. (3.4)
  - At the start of the school year goals served as the framework for setting expectations around teaching and learning. This was communicated in the faculty and student handbooks. Using Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) assessments to create baseline data teacher teams established content area rubrics that aligned with CCLS and curricular maps enabling them to identify students' strengths and needs, as well as determine next steps. Teachers consistently provide students with the opportunity to engage in discussions ensuring that tasks are rigorous and challenging for all learners. The school leadership has strategically developed a culture of high expectations connected to the Danielson Framework for teaching (DFT). The school provides professional learning for teachers through TeachBoost and the DFT on a monthly basis. Areas of study are revisited and discussed during weekly horizontal team meetings as evidenced by meeting agendas. The TeachBoost system supports the collection of outcomes from teachers' observations in the form of data. This data is used to strategically provide professional learning based on the teacher's individual needs, as well as their student data. Teacher teams engaged in walkthroughs focusing on norming exercises around the delivery of instruction. This established a culture of accountability in daily teaching. These structures and systems that are regularly implemented for the entire staff enables the school to hold all constituents to high expectations.
  - High expectations have consistently been established as a part of teacher team meeting using the protocols developed with the network coach. Teachers have been trained to think deeply as they examine student work focusing on

actionable next steps for the learner. There are two network coaches that work with various teacher teams ensuring that teachers meet consistently at least once each week. For example, to ensure that teachers are refining the practice of assessing student learning all teachers use the TAN system (Teacher Assessment Notebook). Teachers consistently take low inference observation notes on student learning. During team meetings coaches support teams by helping to plan next learning steps. Additionally the student advisory committee consisting of two elected student representatives' per-class meets with school leadership monthly advising them on the effectiveness of students learning experiences. This has resulted in all students receiving appropriate guidance and support ensuring they are prepared to move to the next level.

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

- Increase the work around the implementation of teaching strategies that provide effective multiple entry points and ensure all learners are consistently engaged in challenging tasks allowing them to demonstrate higher order thinking skills. (1.2)
  - The school's instructional goals include a focus on student discussion and the understanding of content. School leaders use the DFT to support the growth of teacher pedagogy targeting the strategies necessary to address the CCLS, and instructional shifts. Teacher lesson plans often included well thought out questions, however questioning techniques did not expand to the student to student level. The principal and core team are aware of this disconnect between the data and classroom teaching practices and continues to address these issues through individualized professional learning opportunities for the staff.
  - Classroom visits revealed that some teachers do not consistently align their work with the school wide goals on discussion and understanding of content. For example, teachers demonstrated a lack of higher order questioning skills with minimal entry points provided to English language learners and special education students. Consequently, classrooms across the grades and subjects inconsistently use teaching scaffolds for struggling learners. As a result, all students were not fully engaged in the work and unable to produce work products that represented high levels of deep thinking. For instance, Students in a grade 6 English language arts class cited text to support story themes from "Bud not Buddy" however two out of the four student groups shared that the work was not challenging enough, while students in another group did not understand and could not complete the work without assistance. The implementation of curricular within classrooms has not yet yielded the high quality instruction that provides a myriad of multiple entry points into the lesson to facilitate instruction. Moreover, across classrooms students inconsistently take ownership of the learning, and are hindered from engaging in tasks that are challenging and reflect opportunities for high level thinking.
- Deepen the work of teacher teams to create performance based tasks that expand opportunities for all learners to engage in meaningful work products. (1.3)
  - The Principal effectively uses the school budget to align with school wide goals and the implementation of CCLS aligned curricula in all content areas. Various types of technology are used to engage students in discussion and the

production of meaningful student work products in some classrooms. During a visit to a grade 8 science class students worked in partnerships using mini laptop computers to design grade 8 exit projects. Students used a rubric as they engaged in a peer critique of their work. However, these types of learning opportunities lack consistency across classrooms based on the limited resources in this area. The 2013 State assessments revealed there was a need to provide additional supports for both students and teachers around math, and instruction. This led to grade 7 math teachers and students being selected for the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant. This grant enabled the school to focus on teacher pedagogy using research based teaching strategies and delivery of math instruction and improving student outcomes. The grade seven TIF team works with two consultants and the math coach using a, "train the trainer" model is responsible for supporting the math teachers across the school. This has resulted in the development of rigorous math tasks for students across the school. All math teachers implement the use of Higher Order Thinking (HOT) tasks that are collaboratively developed by teachers. These HOT tasks engage students in short and long term multi-step problems. Based on the common assessment data there has been a 25% increase in student performance and skills acquisition. However, these results represent an uneven distribution of student growth across classrooms. As indicated in the team meeting where teachers expressed a need to open the TIF work up to more teachers in the school, as well as have meeting times that occur consistently so that the process of looking at student work and planning for instruction is more cohesive.

- The principal has elicited the support of their network to focus on the development of consistent practices targeting reflective thinking that leads to changes in the delivery of instruction among teachers. Content area teacher teams meet twice weekly and work with school coaches to refine practices and look at student work. This work has resulted in the development of a data tracker to monitor student success in the four core content areas and teachers' effective use of strategies targeting instructional improvements. The tracker is directly related to school wide and student developed instructional goals. During a vertical grade team meeting teachers engaged in conversation around looking at pieces of grade seven student writing. All teachers agreed that students need more work on the use of grade appropriate vocabulary within their writing. One teacher spoke about how she determines and identifies for her students words she describes as "tired words". These are descriptive words that the students use all the time. For Example... tremendous, quickly, extra, disgusting and sad. The words are listed on a worksheet and students then use a thesaurus to identify words that align in meaning and then use them in their writings. These sheets are then collected and used as a resource by all the students in the class. Students have expanded the use of their vocabulary when writing and during the revision process of their work. Practices such as this are not yet adequately used across classrooms, hindering the use of challenging CCLS aligned tasks that foster proficiency of standard based curriculum across core content areas.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Magnet School of Humanities	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 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?			X				
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the 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 supports 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 those expectations?			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 student 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 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?			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				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed