



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

School of Humanities

Middle School 347

**35 Starr Street
Brooklyn
NY 11221**

Principal: John Barbella

Dates of review: June 2 - 3, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Richard Woolf

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The School of Humanities is a middle school with 551 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 10% Black, 89% Hispanic and 1% White students. The student body includes 19% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 92.2%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 98% eligibility.

The school shares its campus with another middle school, each having two floors of the building. The school splits itself into two smaller academies for the purpose of instruction. The principal has been in his position for the last three years.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal leads the school well with a clear improving focus on student learning.
- Data usage is proving more beneficial to teachers in highlighting areas of student performance.
- Targeting of the school's subgroups is positively impacting in raising their levels of achievement.
- The school has high expectations of its students and parents and both groups are rising to meet the challenges
- The school provides students with an exceptional arts curriculum and a comprehensive after school program
- Parent involvement is improving and the home-school partnership is proving most effective in achieving the schools goals.
- The school has an impressive professional development program to assist teachers in raising student achievement.
- Teacher teamwork is a strong feature of the school's work with staff working collaboratively to improve student learning.
- The school receives very good support from outside organizations clearly focusing on raising students' expectations and linking to the curriculum.
- Attendance at the school is very good reflecting students' attitudes to learning and a desire to improve their educational opportunities.

What the school needs to improve

- Provide teachers with challenging goals, which have quantitative, time-framed targets.
- Continue developing a systematic approach to ensure differentiated instruction for all students.
- Ensure there is a process to identify the school's highest achievers in order for them to improve their achievement levels.
- Assess and monitor student work more rigorously and consistently across all grade levels and subjects.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Under the leadership of the current principal, the school is making adequate progress in raising student achievement. A great deal of this is due to the improving use of data to identify individual students' needs and better inform teacher instruction. Although still in its infancy, teachers are using Acuity more effectively to specifically highlight student strengths and weaknesses. The school now has a far greater understanding of the educational needs of its subgroups. This is particularly so for its special education students and English language learners where progress in raising their achievements levels is most encouraging.

Adaptations to the curriculum take place in order for students to benefit from a more practical approach to their learning. Supporting this is an exceptional arts program, with a particular emphasis on visual arts. This program operates during the day and as an after school experience. The standard of work the students produce is of the highest order, with their efforts gaining recognition throughout New York. Parental involvement is improving. The growing home-school partnership is proving most effective in the achievement of the school's goals and sustaining the high expectations the principal has of his parents and students.

The staff work well together to improve the learning opportunities of the students. However, the school has yet to set its teachers the most challenging of individual, numerical, time-framed targets for them to demonstrate the progress they make with their students. Similarly, there is not yet consistency in the delivery of differentiated instruction. These areas for potential improvement tie in with the lack of rigorous assessment and monitoring across all grade levels and subject areas.

Since the previous Quality Review, the school has made good progress in a number of areas for improvement. Data is now used more effectively to identify student need, especially within the sub groups. A strong professional development program is in place and the science curriculum has been revised to make it more meaningful to a greater number of students. The inquiry team is instrumental in much of the improving work among students in the subgroups. The team is able to show that careful and targeted goal setting for each student is positively impacting his or her progress. This approach is filtering down to other aspects of the school's work with encouraging results.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the student’s progress over time.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

Over the last twelve months, the school has demonstrated a far greater use of data to inform instruction. Administrators now use data with a stronger clarity of purpose. They use data to target specific areas of the school’s work and share findings with teachers. This is helping teachers to focus more on the benefits of using data to inform their instruction.

The analysis of data, as it pertains to the school’s subgroups, is a clear indicator of the effectiveness of this approach. The biggest gains are in the progress of the English language learners, a key area of improvement from the previous Quality Review. Other significant gains result from the analysis of gender and ethnic groupings, especially in terms of raising achievement on the school’s progress report. The achievement of special education students continues to grow. The school does make comparisons with other and similar schools and takes opportunities to reach out to these schools for assistance. The principal tracks cohorts over time by studying both longitudinal and horizontal data. As a result, he has a clearer perspective of whole school progress and how data will help with improving the school’s achievements even further. This is a feature he brought into the school to highlight to staff the importance of data. It is assisting in helping to make decisions for future planning. All teachers have access to technology in their classrooms. They receive training in its use to analyze data, and for the majority it is proving an invaluable tool in improving instruction. The principal is moving this forward by seeking ways of having all relevant class data put onto a central database for better ease of access for teachers.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school has a number of goals in place to meet its mission statement. These overarching goals translate into specific yearly goals. Consultation takes place with the senior leadership team over the yearly goals. However, the school does not yet set sufficiently challenging targets for its highest-achieving students or its teachers. The special education students and English language learners are able to demonstrate good progress. This arises from the specific goals set by teachers and administrators as a deliberate step in improving their achievement levels. The school is also looking to highlight a small group of students with the potential of becoming holdovers to receive closer attention in meeting their individual needs. Most students are aware of their own targets, especially in reading, and they understand how next steps in learning help them improve.

The school shares its goals with the wider community and takes every opportunity to highlight and revisit them with students, in assemblies and advisory, and with parents at their meetings. This very much aligns with the high expectations the school has of itself, its students and parents. Parents acknowledge the importance of sharing these high aspirations with the school. The home-school partnership is growing strongly and students acknowledge this. “It appears everyday someone from school contacts home, for

good as well as bad things. It shows we are cared for.” Attendance at parent teacher conferences is high with more parents appreciating the efforts teachers are making in improving educational opportunities for their children. Teachers discuss student targets at these meetings. The school offers workshops for parents to help them become more aware of their children’s learning needs.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

By carefully analyzing student needs, the school is making a number of changes to the mandated curriculum. This is particularly the case for science and math. In both subjects, the school is now taking a more practical approach to student learning. By adopting this method, the school is seeing larger numbers of students improve their achievement levels in these subjects. Cross-curricular work does take place between subjects and there are plans to develop this further in the next academic year. Teachers are increasingly using Acuity to help them highlight specific strengths and weaknesses of students’ work and therefore allowing adjustments to take place in their instruction.

The school is fortunate to support the formal curriculum with a remarkable arts program. At the forefront of this is an exceptional visual arts program, delivery of which takes place during the day and as part of an extensive after school program. The standard of visual art is of the highest order. Student work is on display at the Museum of Modern Art as a result of winning a citywide competition. Student artwork will take center stage of an exhibition in one of the city parks over the summer vacation. This work depicts life growing up within Bushwick. In addition to this specific program, the school offers a wide range of academic and social activities, including sports, which fully engage the students. Attendance at the after school program is very high.

Teachers are improving their skills in order to deliver lessons in a differentiated way. There are examples of good practice but as yet, there is a lack of consistency in delivery across the entire school. The principal acknowledges this as he and his instructional cabinet seek ways of ensuring a more systematic approach across all subject areas. Careful budgeting means there is no loss to the school in terms of its number one priority, student learning. The school has high rates of attendance. This reflects on the students’ enjoyment of school and the safe and secure environment it provides them.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The school affords a great deal of time in developing its professional development programs. The administration surveys teachers twice in the year. This is to ascertain whether the programs offered meet their professional and personal needs. There is clear evidence to show the improvement in the use of data results from such programs. The administration uses informal classroom visits and numerous written documents to provide immediate feedback, which the teachers greatly appreciate. The data from such visits also prompts strategic professional development programs.

Staff meet in a number of teams at both the academy level and subject level. At all times the focus is clearly on raising the level of their individual instruction and therefore student learning. The collegiality of the staff allows numerous intervisitations to take place that are non-threatening and therefore supportive. New staff sees this as exceptionally important as they seek to find their way within the school. As one teacher said, "There is always someone to help and knowing that is so important." Teachers receive additional help from the school's support services team. This team is proving important in attending to the emotional, social and learning needs of the students. Together all staff have a positive impact on the educational experience students at this school receive. Students realize the part they play in making the school a harmonious place. Behavior around the school is very good and movement between lessons is orderly and purposeful. The school has sought assistance from a group of outside organizations to assist them in improving the students' learning experiences, especially in terms of the arts and after school programs.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Ongoing monitoring and revision takes place, but it lacks the rigor of other aspects of the school's work. There is insufficient in-depth data analysis to show that students are progressing towards meeting interim, time-framed benchmarks. Teachers meet with the principal and assistant principals to demonstrate that progress is taking place as a result of their instruction. However, the process is not sufficiently thorough to fully challenge teachers and for them to demonstrate they are making sufficient progress with their classes.

The use of Acuity in the school is in its infancy, although a number of staff embrace it as a means of testing whether their instruction meets the needs of the students. For those using this diagnostic test, the outcomes are proving beneficial. Others use more traditional assessment procedures, such as past test forms. This does provide interim data, but there is a lack of consistency in whole school assessment procedures. When data shows current thinking and planning require revision, the instructional cabinet acts quickly.

The supervisory cabinet has a clear overview of school progress. They meet formally each week to look at data and make recommendations for changes should the need arise. Their oversight includes the monitoring of each academy and individual classes within the academies. The school has a good system in place for effective planning. Each member of staff gives their opinions of how successful their teaching strategies are in progressing students. Likewise, they analyze what is not successful. This information provides the basis for a new planning cycle. However, as in other areas of monitoring, the system is currently not rigorous enough. The principal is clear in his vision of ensuring every student receives an education that meets his or her individual needs. Parents and staff support him in this view, as they all seek to work in partnership to make their ambitions become a reality.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: School of Humanities	△	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score			X		

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?			X		
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?			X		
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X		

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?			X		
2.2 focus on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area?				X	
2.3 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?			X		
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?				X	
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?				X	
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X		

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?			X		
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?			X		
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X		

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?			X		
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					X

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped