

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Dr Edmund Horan School

Middle-High School 79

**55 East 120 Street
New York
NY 10035**

Principal: Rebecca Bravo

Dates of review: March 12 - 16, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Frank Jones

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Dr Edmund Horan is a middle-high school with 409 students from grade 6 through grade 12+. The school population comprises 36% Black, 58% Hispanic, 4% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 33% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 80.5%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

This District 75 School is housed in one building. It has increased in size this year and now serves students on the autistic spectrum as well as other students with specific and highly complex learning needs.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Dr Edmund Horan is a proficient school with several well-developed features and some inconsistencies. A wealth of pertinent data is collected and analyzed effectively to provide all staff with an extremely clear picture of the academic, social, emotional and communication skills of each student. This information is further disaggregated to enable the school to use the results to compare and contrast the performance of the many subgroups within the school. A flexible approach to scheduling results in the practical application of this data to individual class and group compositions. However, the monitoring of the implementation and impact of individual education plans lacks rigor.

The inquiry team has engaged in some very good research work, which is beginning to impact on learning and has encouraged the launch of other teams in the school. Classroom observations take place but they lack sufficient rigor to make a significant impression on improving instruction. Neither is the information resulting from these observations aligned to personalized professional goals for teachers to enable them to focus on specific improvement issues. These weaknesses result in inconsistent teaching across the school. The best lessons demonstrate differentiated activities, which clearly match student specific goals. This quality of teaching and learning is not embedded in all practice

Students benefit immensely from a well-constructed and broad curriculum, which provides students with enriching experiences at all levels. The practical nature of the vocational programs results in students practicing recently learned skills in real life situations. In this way, they recognize both their importance and relevance. These aptitudes are further enhanced by an exceptionally good community-based training program which is closely matched to student prior experiences and learning. Students welcome these opportunities and are enthusiastic about the potential they afford. They are also extremely positive about the culture of care and support which is prevalent in the school. They feel safe and are confident that help will be available should it be needed. This is echoed by the staff and the principal whose commitment and care for students as individuals is a hallmark of the school and fosters a climate of mutual trust.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The collection and analysis of data are very good and provide the school with a clear understanding of the performance, skills and communication levels of each student and subgroup.
- Students benefit greatly from a rich and varied curriculum that offers a range of academic and vocational opportunities, which are linked well to the skills they will require post formal education.
- The evident passion and commitment exhibited by the principal and staff as they attempt to meet the complex and specific needs of all students are extremely high.
- The inquiry team has been particularly effective in producing a unit of study to improve and enhance students' speaking and listening skills and by increasing the number of teams operating within the school.
- Students are extremely well prepared for, enjoy and greatly benefit from community-based instruction, which is a developing aspect of the many opportunities offered by school partnerships.
- Students speak highly of the school, trust their teachers and feel safe and secure in a culture, driven by the principal, of mutual trust, support and care.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine the quality and robustness of classroom observations undertaken by assistant principals by clearly identifying what each teacher has to do to improve their practice and monitoring their progress towards success.
- Ensure that individual education plan goals are regularly and robustly monitored and that teachers are fully cognizant of and utilize them to inform their instruction.
- Ensure that teachers differentiate their instruction so that personalized tasks clearly match the identified learning needs and incremental goals of each student.
- Continue to develop and differentiate professional development and closely monitor its impact on the performance of each teacher in the classroom, with emphasis on student learning.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

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

The school collects a wide range of pertinent data from a variety of external and internal sources. This is carefully analyzed and married together to give a detailed understanding of the performance, skills and communication levels of each student. Centrally based data includes the Child Assistance Program (CAP) and Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS). The school relies heavily on BRIGANCE, amongst other diagnostic systems. This is cross-referenced with the New York alternate assessments to provide a useful statement relating to student performance matched against State standards. This good connection provides State benchmarks against which the school measures progress and performance for each student.

The school has further carefully disaggregated and analyzed the data to identify the performance of subgroups and to uncover emerging patterns of significance. The English language learner population is relatively high and the use of the New York State English as a second language achievement test (NYSESLAT) has proven particularly useful to focus on the performance of this group. As a result, the school is now examining organizational strategies, which could most effectively meet the needs of this population. The school is therefore extremely adept at identifying need and tracking the progress of students.

The review of individual education plans and the goals they contain provide one effective way for parents to be made aware of their child's abilities and successes in school. This information is supplemented and complemented in a variety of ways through phone calls, emails report cards and teacher-parent meetings, which focus on specific issues applicable to individual students. In this way, parents are regularly apprised of their child's progress. An automated system automatically contacts parents about absence and this ensures there is a close monitoring of these vulnerable students. However, the extremely fragile nature of a significant number of students with complex medical needs impacts adversely on attendance figures. Evidence of a pilot study using Achieve 3000 initially suggests that the ability for parents to log on to their own child is providing valuable information about programs being followed and importantly suggestions of ways parents can support the work being done in school. Parents using the program were positive about its impact and the support it gave them.

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 goals in individual education plans (IEPs) are informed by data primarily through the BRIGANCE diagnostic system. This system provides the overarching individual goals and the incremental steps required to meet them. Assessment procedures are subsequently built in and aligned to State standards. The goals and incremental steps produced in this fashion are by their nature relatively general and are “designed mainly as a guide for teachers”. This at times has led to a lack of focus in the implementation of the goals. On occasion, there is an inconsistency in the quality of the learning activities and the monitoring of progress towards the goal. When a goal is not reached the predominant reason given is “lack of time” with little evidence that the strategies employed had been analyzed for applicability. Inconsistencies in some IEPs have a detrimental impact on the focus of the next steps in learning. This deficiency is in direct contrast to the evident passion and commitment exhibited by the principal and staff as they attempt to meet the complex and specific needs of all students. IEP goals provided by related services are more focused and therefore help develop communication and other functional skills.

There is a good link between the principal’s personal goals and the school’s annual goals. These provide direction and purpose for all concerned. The goals are generated from a variety of sources and demonstrate a congruity with comments and issues raised in the school survey and the last Quality Review. Good analysis of advice and comment ensures the school is addressing the key issues to improve student learning. Goals included in the schools Comprehensive Educational Plan are time-framed and subject to scrutiny by the cabinet. However, there is a lack of rigor in the scrutiny, which detracts on occasion from the school’s ability to make adjustments.

The school is extremely effective in the way it cares for the needs of all students. Students recognize this and both they and their families appreciate the concern the school has for meeting the totality of student need through the good use of related services. Parents contribute to this process and on occasion suggest goals for their child that could enhance the quality of life of the family. Sound methods of communication are welcomed by parents. The communication they receive is through formal methods such as reports or “need to know” telephone conversation, e-mail or personal contact. However, some parents of non-verbal children expressed the view that more regular contact about how their child “has been today” would lower their anxiety levels and make them feel more securely involved. The principal is particularly good in this area as are some staff, but there is a level of inconsistency in staff’s approach.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Students benefit greatly from a rich and varied curriculum that is closely aligned to State standards. Subjects such as art, science, music, physical education and home economics provide a range of academic and vocational opportunities, which are well linked to the skills that students will require post formal education. Students report that they enjoy and are engaged by the experiences available to them. In one classroom, students were carrying out cookery and audit tasks that gave them the opportunity to practice known skills in a real life context and learn new ones. At this time, students were highly engaged in the learning process. However, this level of differentiated activity is not consistently applied throughout the school. On these occasions, tasks do not match student need, the pace of learning slows and students become disengaged.

Structures and processes are firmly in place to support a coherent rigorous approach to instruction. However, variable application of learning and skills-based goals results in some students not having sufficient focused opportunity to practice recent learning as they strive for mastery. Monitoring of the incremental steps to reach IEP goals takes place on a continuous basis and formally every four months. In a number of cases, the goals are not sufficiently utilized to inform instruction and progress towards them is not clearly evaluated. When teachers are fully cognizant of requirements and put in place effective assessments, as is the case in many lessons, students make rapid progress.

Students speak highly of the school and what it provides for them. They make telling comparisons with their experiences in general education settings. One student said, "All we had to do was take notes in my last school and if I didn't understand they didn't help." There is a pervasive culture of trust, care and mutual support that is prevalent amongst students and between students and staff. Many of these students are exceptionally vulnerable, but they feel confident that they can turn to each other and to their teachers for help in the sure knowledge that it will be forthcoming.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The inquiry team has carried out some extremely useful research, which has resulted in the development of a study unit relating to enhancing speaking and listening skills. This gives students more access to, and increased interaction with, the world they live in and specifically supports their ability to operate effectively in community-based instruction placements. It is too soon for the school to have completed a comprehensive assessment of the unit's impact but early indications are very positive and the number of students working in the community continues to rise. The enthusiasm of the team is infectious and the school has now initiated three additional inquiry teams charged with the responsibility of research to improve student learning and the opportunities this will afford. This is particularly pertinent as it reflects one of the annual goals in the Comprehensive Educational Plan.

Teachers who are new to the school or to the profession report that they are extremely well supported and feel that they can ask their mentor or other colleagues for help or clarification should the occasion arise. Professional development is provided for specific programs that deal with students on the autistic spectrum. Teachers find this training very beneficial in developing strategies that meet the needs of the students they teach.

Assistant principals carry out classroom observations. Teachers affirm that they find these helpful occasions to guide and improve their practice. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate and feel that inter-visitations are particularly rewarding especially when they have a specific focus relating to improving a particular area of their own practice. However, there is a lack of significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning resulting from classroom observations. This is because insufficient attention is placed on identifying the specific strategies that would impact positively on each teacher's instruction. Teachers do not have personal goals that derive from lesson observations and focus on specific improvement strategies. Therefore, professional development is not directed sufficiently well at areas that could enhance personal growth. Teachers are encouraged to evaluate their practice. This is a good feature, but this initiative is still at an embryonic stage and therefore outcomes are not yet measurable.

Community-based instruction is an exceptionally positive feature of the school and one that is thoroughly enjoyed by those students who get a chance to operate successfully in the workplace utilizing those skills they have striven to gain. Vocational activities within the school are a fertile grounding for community placements and this causal link results in the skills of the students and the needs of the workplace being closely matched. There are over eleven sites used for training and approximately 150 students benefit greatly as a result.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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.

The school goals are apposite, derived from relevant data and are time scaled. They therefore give purpose and direction to the school's work. Strategies for improving the quality of teacher instruction are less effective and consequently there is an inconsistency in performance across the school. One teacher was outstanding in her ability to match tasks to student needs but this was the exception rather than the rule.

Student progress is monitored well and IEPs reflect student need. However, there remains a variance in the quality of evaluation of performance and the focus on learning and skills development for students. The school is good at promoting collaboration and sharing effective strategies that enhance learning. Data is used extremely effectively to identify groups and groupings of students. Additional analysis has helped the school recognize when the placement is not in the best interests of a student. When this occurs, the school responds flexibly and swiftly remedies the situation.

A lack of rigor and focus in key areas has led to inconsistencies within the school which limits its rate of progress. The principal is secure in her knowledge about what she wants for the school and how to achieve it. As a result, she has set up an organizational structure with processes and practices that have the potential to ensure that her vision can become a reality.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Dr Edmund Horan School	△	▷	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?				X
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?				X
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?				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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?			X	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYQ, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X	
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X		
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.

<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?		X		
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?				X
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X	
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X	

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

<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X	
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?		X		
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X	

Quality Review Scoring Key

△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed
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