

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Charles H. Houston School
Elementary-Middle School 332
51 Christopher Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11212

Principal: Deborah Pierce

Dates of review: March 25 - 26, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Donald Conyers

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Charles H. Houston is an elementary-middle school with 544 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 62% Black, 37% Hispanic and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 86.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 78% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Upon entry into the school visitors are made to feel safe and welcome. The students move about the building with a sense of purpose and anticipation. The school community expects all its members to be continuing learners and advance their personal and academic development. The principal and staff collect and analyze a great deal of data across subjects to inform practices for learning and to activate any needed programs. However the school does not take the necessary steps to summarize the data at the grade, class and student levels in order to: determine trends, further promote progress, performance and to strengthen the feedback given to parents and students about learning results. Data review does lead to planning for the various subgroups and the school responds effectively with organization and initiatives. Assessments are made in English language arts, math, science and social studies. However, assessments in science and social studies are at an early stage in their development and lack usefulness and consistency. Data is used well with regards to attendance rates. When the school identified specific groups of interest it responded by putting a plan in place with a resultant improvement in attendance.

Teachers confer with students and parents to inform them of outcomes, progress and learning needs. Although the school has not embedded the use of rubrics and explicit teacher comments in order to help students determine their next suitable steps in learning they are set short-term learning goals in the areas of English language arts, math and science. Teachers meet during common planning times to prepare for lessons but do not regularly use the data to set grade goals to ensure that student learning needs are met in a timely fashion.

The school inquiry team has done good work with the special education students in the aspect of reading comprehension. The team shares its work with the school community and has circulated research abstracts and materials to improve student learning. This has led to special education students receiving extra credit on the City's progress report for showing marked academic improvement. School leaders have not taken enough steps to ensure that teachers benefit from ongoing feedback resulting from observations and measurement against personal professional growth goals. This has resulted in teachers not knowing the most effective steps to take, especially in the areas of differentiating lessons and maintaining academic rigor across classroom lessons.

The principal is positive and works with others to make key decisions in order to promote growth within the school community. Good use of the school budget advances school improvement.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school leaders make good use of tools to collect student data in order to improve instructional practice and student learning.
- The school inquiry team has developed effective practice around the inquiry process, which has led to an increase in student achievement.
- Classroom teachers are informed by student data that they consistently manage in English language arts, math and to some extent in science, in order to plan and assess student learning.
- School leaders make good use of the budget to support the identified needs of the students, parents and teachers within the school community.
- Teachers provide parents and families with information about student learning needs and outcomes in an effort to maximize student achievement.
- Principal and staff convey high expectations to students regarding their attendance and scholastic achievement and students work to reach the expectations.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve and make consistent, collaborative planning and goal setting at the grade level along with appropriate timelines to ensure that students' learning needs are better met in science and social studies.
- Revise and update individual professional development plans and increase the ability of teachers in differentiating their lessons across subjects to enable all students to reach their learning goals.
- Extend the practice of providing meaningful feedback, including that written, in order to drive successive learning steps for students.
- Summarize assessment results in order to comprehensively understand the performance and progress of each grade, class and student.

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 proficient.

Data collection is a strength and the principal manages it well by providing grade and class data to teachers so that attention to student learning can be given. However the necessary steps to summarize data at grade, class and student levels to fully understand progress and performance in some subjects and to direct timely action as well as to strengthen the feedback given to students about learning results, is inconsistent. The school identifies over-aged students, gender, special education students and English language learners and uses the data to set short-term learning goals in; science, math, and English language arts and to report on progress. Opportunities for parents to view and understand student progress are made through Acuity and parent workshops. Parents receive State and formal assessment results while the middle school parents also receive a document showing learning results and goals across at least three subjects. This has resulted in more parents understanding student needs and goals. Good attention is given to the learning requirements of subgroups. The school does well with student conferences in order to inform students about progress and next learning steps although there is inconsistent feedback through teachers' written comments based on the use of rubrics to help students articulate consistently their next learning steps across subjects.

Good analysis of student attendance data has led to the development of individual plans for each of the students identified. Attendance has improved as a result of this intervention. The principal provides the staff with updated data results of academic subjects and attendance in order to celebrate student accomplishments and to highlight areas of need.

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's Comprehensive Educational Plan illuminates important issues and the leadership team ensures that all constituencies are aware of the whole school goals. It has a mechanism in place to monitor and evaluate ascribed plans in order to gauge success within the identified areas. Periodic review of the interim benchmarks has led to the generation of new goals and revised action steps in attendance and technology. The school has not involved many parents effectively in the subsequent stages of school improvement beyond the initial development of the plan. This represents a missed opportunity for parents to examine school goals regularly. School leaders meet with teachers weekly to review progress being made in the implementation of instructional plans and to report data results. Teachers work with administrators to receive information and resources in order to advance student learning. This has led to more

teachers broadly generating differentiated plans. However, teachers do not use this time to set detailed differentiated individual and group goals consistently when they plan for instruction.

The school showcases student events in order to help parents understand what their children are learning. This raises the opportunity for teachers to regularly reach many parents to update them concerning the school's expectations for learning. In addition to: the *incentives* program, the *wall of fame* for parents and the principal's addresses, the school hosts family nights that have academic themes and practical assistance for parents. This has led to more parents feeling supported and informed about student progress.

In classrooms, teachers use some data results to set individual goals along with suitable plans. Many lessons and units are introduced with pre-assessments in order to select appropriate entry points for teaching. Grade planning meetings enable teachers to plan for each of the disciplines. Knowledge of the curriculum drives the planning more than consistent reliance on data to ensure that students' learning goals and plans to achieve them are precisely developed. The irregular use of the data to set grade and class goals makes it more difficult for student learning needs to be met or even bettered within the expected timescale.

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.

Teachers instruct students in the areas of reading, writing, social studies and science within the context of State content standards. Great emphasis on the use of technology to improve learning extends from the school improvement plan to the classroom where the use of interactive whiteboards boards, *Plato*, *Digutablia* and computers engage the students and enrich some of the lessons. Teachers of kindergarten through grade 2 utilize the core knowledge curriculum to support social studies and literacy. Students respond well to the hands-on science lessons and indicate that they have just started to perform differentiated tasks within the lessons. Teachers differentiate some lessons in English language arts, math, science and art, but not all teachers make enough use of data and their detailed knowledge of student learning to differentiate all their lessons across subjects in order to meet the needs of every learner.

The school has recently purchased some new series for teaching reading in the elementary and middle school. These programs guide teachers through steps to help differentiate lessons and enable students to be assessed at regular intervals. Teachers' assessment systems drive goal setting and planning. However, these systems do not help to develop a clear enough picture of student progress over time and across subject areas because the data results are not summarized. This hinders the rigorous goal setting and detailed planning of lessons possible after consulting the data. The school has a progressive fine arts program that students are happy to attend. The principal's good use of the budget has enabled students to participate in: dance, chorus, the reading lab and enrichment programs, after school and Saturday programs. As a result of the school's assessment review, the principal is able to monitor these programs and make revisions.

Classroom teachers successfully promote character education in order to foster greater respect, civil service and collaboration within the school community. They link projects and literary pieces to the activities and students respond favorably, as indicated by the calm learning environment in each classroom.

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 school uses the United Federation of Teachers teacher center as a nexus for adult learning and meets regularly with school administrators to examine challenges that they are having within their teaching practice. Teachers visit each other's classrooms formally and informally to observe specific areas of interest in order to improve their own teaching and share ideas. Professional development topics support the whole school goals found within the Comprehensive Educational Plan and teachers are making good progress with these goals. The school highlights looking at student work to understand the learning needs of students and teachers. The inquiry team has been integral in raising the level of reflection by providing research abstracts for group discussion and study groups. As a result of the inquiry team's work, more teachers are willing and actually using the inquiry process to address the learning needs of their students. Teachers use the common principles that support inquiry to improve their understanding of student needs and the use of effective change strategies. This has resulted in more teachers collaborating in improving student results.

There are several layers of support in the building so that teachers feel confident that they can find assistance when needed. The school also extends professional development services by hiring various consultants to support professional development topics. School leaders meet weekly with teachers and discuss student outcomes. They miss critical opportunities to address specific and detailed teacher needs, as the emphasis is on student outcomes. School leaders do not consistently provide teachers with timely feedback resulting from formal observations. This limits the chances of teachers addressing and considering what steps they should take in order to improve their delivery and ultimately, student learning. Many teachers do have individualized professional growth plans but the administration has not informed this practice well enough to give teachers interim benchmarks with timeframes so that feedback will be meaningful and measured. As a result goals are set and remain in place for extended periods of time without revision.

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 principal does a good job consulting and sharing grade level, subgroup and student data over time to evaluate student outcomes and to make necessary adjustments. One example of this is the discovery that the black males and females were performing better than the Hispanic subgroup on periodic assessments in math. The school formed a think tank and began to explore this concern in order to resolve this issue. Teachers in the middle school are effective in assessing students and setting goals for students

across the disciplines. Elementary teachers encourage student goal setting in English language arts, science and math and use data results to adjust teaching of lessons well.

The school relies on school-wide interim checkpoints to ensure that student learning across the subject areas is improving for all students. Weekly meetings with school leaders enable teachers to examine student results, extend lessons and share ideas about lesson improvement. School leaders and teachers have set up benchmark periods to assess students in reading, writing, math and science. The assessment results are used to inform and support instructional groups, and activities. This has wrought positive results. However, the school does not use this time successfully or the fund of knowledge to successfully differentiate each lesson sufficiently to maximize student learning.

School leaders value professional development efforts and are just beginning to rely on data to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of teacher professional development but have not yet maximized the use of formal observations as a tool for valuable feedback. They miss the opportunity to use individualized teacher growth plans to promote a cycle of support, practice and assessment anchored to interim goals in order to evaluate the achievement of long-term goals. However there is a coherent vision for the school's development that is understood by all members of the school community.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Charles H Houston 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