

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

The Choir Academy of Harlem
Middle School - High School 469
2005 Madison Avenue
New York
NY 10035

Principal: A. Ellen Parris

Dates of review: May 4 – 5, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Jeffrey Soloff

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Choir Academy of Harlem is a middle school – high school with 426 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 79% Black, 20% Hispanic and 1% White students. The student body includes 0% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 33% of the students enrolled and girls account for 67%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 90.8% for the middle school and 82.1% for the high school. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 64% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal's passion for education and her commitment to the school has resulted in a radical change in the culture of the school in a short period. The principal, during her 16 months in the school, has established a culture that focuses on student achievement, professional growth and teacher collaboration. There is increased rigor in the curriculum along with higher expectations of student and teacher performance. Members of the staff understand the school's vision and are working collaboratively to improve the learning experience for students. Teachers have a voice in the school and enjoy working in a learning and respectful environment.

Classroom observations, both formal and informal, are performed frequently by the administrative team. The use of data is now a standard part of the post-observation process. Teachers are held accountable for their performance in the classroom. Through professional development, there has been an increase in the understanding of the use of data by teachers and administrators, which has led to better decision making about grouping and instruction. Differentiation is not, however, a consistent practice in all classrooms and across all core subjects. In addition, the school's plans do not have the interim goals and timeframes through which progress towards long-term goals can be measured. The inquiry team has concentrated on the lowest performing students on the English language arts test and has studied the same group of students in both the sixth and seventh grades. Information gleaned from their study enables the team to modify the instructional program for these students. Individual student goals, while written in the sixth and ninth grades, are not evident throughout the school.

Effective partnerships with community-based organizations provide additional resources to supplement the regular school program. The principal has expanded these partnerships and is constantly looking for more resources for the students. The introduction of progress reports and a new phone messenger system has increased communication with parents. Teachers are accessible to parents and provide many tutoring opportunities for the students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's positive leadership has created a culture that focuses on student achievement and teacher collaboration, which supports professional growth.
- Through regular use of a wide range of data, administrators and teachers have a better understanding of individual and group performance, which informs instruction.
- The principal enhances the rigor of the curriculum by introducing new programs and raises the bar for teacher performance and student learning.
- The observation process provides constructive feedback for teachers and incorporates the use of achievement data into the post-observation process.
- The school is effective in reaching out to parents and keeping them abreast of their child's progress.
- The school has effective partnerships with community-based organizations and colleges that provide worthwhile programs, resources and support for students for their academic and personal growth.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve the consistency of the differentiation of classroom learning activities to provide appropriate challenges aligned to students' achievement levels.
- Extend goal setting for and by students to all grades and all subjects so that students and parents are fully aware of learning needs and next steps.
- Broaden the work of the inquiry team so that the learning needs of all sub-groups are identified more accurately and more teachers participate in the process.
- Improve strategic monitoring by setting interim checkpoint goals to periodically evaluate the progress made in reaching the school's long-term achievement goals.

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.

The school collects and analyzes a wide variety of data from standardized tests, Regents examinations, quarterly pass/fail rates, predictive assessments and teacher-made assessments. Software such as Read 180 and Study Island provide additional data. The principal stated, "Our programs are data driven and research based." Teachers discuss data during weekly common planning time meetings as well as at monthly departmental meetings. They assess the students' current levels and the strategies necessary to move them forward. Student assessment portfolios, which are evident in each classroom, show student progress in English language arts and math.

The school has clearly defined processes in place to gather, analyze and interpret formative, summative and diagnostic data for students' performance and progress. A gender analysis revealed that girls outperform boys. The assistant principals and guidance counselor meet one-on-one with students who are at risk of failing in an effort to get them to pass. However, school leaders have not yet analyzed the progress of many of the subgroups in the school population.

Teachers are at different levels of proficiency in data analysis. Professional development, provided by the data specialist, has raised teachers' awareness of how to analyze data and make specific changes in their instructional program. This professional development has deepened their understanding and teachers have gained confidence in the use of data this year, resulting in improved teacher practice.

Parents receive feedback on their child's performance mid-way through each marking period. Progress reports, report cards as well as informal and formal meetings with teachers keep parents informed. While these reports provide students' learning outcomes, their next learning steps are not articulated to parents. In an effort to keep parents apprised, a new phone messenger system to monitor attendance informs families about their child and provides information about school-wide events. Back to School Night, initiated this year, brought many parents into the school in September. The Parent Coordinator provides valuable interactions with parents.

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 principal has established a collaborative atmosphere. A team of administrators and teachers work together to develop the Comprehensive Educational Plan. This collaboration promotes the development of a shared vision among key constituents. School-wide goals as outlined in the Comprehensive Educational Plan are then translated into departmental goals for the year. The Comprehensive Educational Plan, reviewed at monthly leadership team meetings, guides the school forward. Goals, objectives and benchmarks are included in the plan. A small number of parents were involved in the plan’s development, thereby limiting ownership and support for the plan.

The school uses weekly meetings to analyze student data and set departmental goals. The leadership team, consisting of the principal, assistant principals, United Federation of Teachers representative, teachers and parents meets monthly to see if goals are being met and to create plans to move forward. Specific learning goals, set by sixth and ninth graders in some subjects, were not in evidence in all core subjects. This prevents teachers from focusing on student progress. Goals were not set by most of the students in the other grades. Student assessment portfolios, which are evident in each classroom, show student progress in English language arts and math. The portfolios motivate students to work harder to improve their performance. The staff provides supplemental instruction during the ninth period at the end of the day as well as in a Saturday academy.

A scholarship report, which is generated after each marking period, indicates pass/fail rates. The principal meets with every teacher whose pass/fail rate falls below her expectations to discuss how the teacher can make changes in each student’s instructional program in order to help the student improve their performance.

The school’s goal is to raise the academic expectations of parents and students. These expectations are mailed to parents at the start of school. Monthly newsletters publicize goals and expectations. All students are encouraged to attend college. Last year, 100% of the seniors who graduated went to college. Honors courses as well as a chapter of the National Honor Society are now part of the school’s program.

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.

In a little more than a year in the school, the principal has changed its culture to a student-centered one marked by high standards for academics and for discipline. The principal has earned the trust and respect of students, staff and parents by her commitment to the school and community. As part of the focus on improving instruction and students’ engagement in their learning, teachers are required to have written plans for differentiation in their lesson plans. While some attempts are made at differentiation, it is not embedded school-wide in all core subjects. As a result, not all students make

progress towards achieving their goals and some find the work does not sufficiently extend their thinking.

The rigor of the curriculum has been upgraded by the principal and honors classes are now available to students. Students speak enthusiastically about the changes in the course offerings. Academic intervention services are provided as well as a ninth period optional class for extra help. The curriculum is aligned with the New York State standards, and the standards are posted in every classroom. The school is now in the process of upgrading its vocal music program after having severed its relationship with the Boys Choir of Harlem. The principal's focus on instruction, aimed at improving teacher practice and student learning, has led to the use of rubrics, Bloom's Taxonomy and differentiated instruction. The finance committee, consisting of the chairperson of the school leadership team, the principal, the assistant principals and the payroll secretary, meets weekly in order to make cogent budgetary decisions that support effective school practices. Five Smart Boards were recently purchased in an effort to expand teachers' use of technology and, in turn, increase student performance. The school is exploring other avenues to increase the number of computers available to students.

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.

Administrators conduct informal "walk through" observations consistently. Formal observations are conducted at least three times a year for each teacher. In post-observation conferences schools leaders discuss and plan next instructional steps. New teachers work with mentors and teachers are encouraged to select a "buddy" teacher to assist them. Teachers reported that this has eased the transition into school.

During common planning time, teachers collaborate to decide on how the curriculum can be modified to meet the needs of their students. Teachers share methods, materials, and schedule intervisitations to inform practice. Many of them say the constructive feedback and opportunities to share effective practices have made them more reflective in their teaching.

The inquiry team meets regularly to analyze and discuss the learning outcomes of students. The current focus is on students who performed in the lowest third on the English language arts test. These same students were the targeted population last year. However, the work of last year's inquiry team did not support targeting the same students again this year because there are other sub-groups that need to be studied. The school has not yet established expectations that all teachers need to be engaged in the inquiry process. Data from Acuity, teacher-made tests and the Gates-McGinity test reveals that these students are making progress. The inquiry team conducted low inference observations and examined item analyses of tests in order to inform planning. The work of the inquiry team is limited in scope and does not study students in other grades or in other subjects.

New school initiatives such as the Breakfast Club and after-school tutoring have contributed to the progress made by the students. Excellent partnerships with community-based organizations supplement the regular instructional program. The

Netherland American Community Trust creates performance opportunities for the chorus at Carnegie Hall and with the New York Pops Orchestra. The Pelham Fritz Basketball League gives college scholarships and is in the process of developing a mentoring program. The YWCA supports parents with job counseling and offers a General Education Diploma program for a high school diploma. Students receive community service credit through the City Year program. Teachers and students enjoy a friendly, supportive relationship. The school is calm and is a place where learning takes place. A student government, established this year, provides an opportunity for students to get involved in decision making.

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, well respected by teachers, parents and students, has a clear vision statement that is posted in the halls and in every classroom. The school's vision, based on the Comprehensive Educational Plan, is to create and maintain a culture that is sensitive to the learning of all students and provide enriched academic experiences. The collaborative culture of the school encourages self-reflection and debate. Specific goals for attendance and student performance are measurable. The staff is committed to improving student outcomes and raising expectations. Upon her arrival last year, the principal quickly identified key areas for improvement so that the needs of all students are addressed. School safety, attendance, lateness and pedagogy are monitored consistently in order to provide a safe environment for students and to improve teacher practice. Great strides have been made in each area. The improvement in pedagogy is a work in progress. Professional development opportunities aimed at informing teachers' knowledge of differentiation began this year in an effort to improve student learning. The principal states that more professional development in this area is planned for next year.

Schools leaders review a scholarship report with each teacher's pass/fail rate after each period. The school meets with teachers at the end of each marking period to discuss instructional strategies and learning outcomes of students. Although data is reviewed by teachers during weekly common planning time, monthly departmental meetings and at post-observation conferences, they do not have benchmarks or interim goals. The absence of interim goals inhibits student progress. In an effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning, the principal monitors teacher practice and student performance through frequent observations, weekly meetings with assistant principals, feedback from departmental meetings and reports from the guidance department. The principal states, "Instruction has improved because the administration is making teachers aware of areas for improvement and providing support for them to improve." Systems are not yet in place for school leaders and faculty to revise groupings and create new, measurable learning goals for every student.

School leaders have addressed the areas for improvement from the last Quality Review including improving the teachers' use of data, increasing the range of extracurricular activities, developing and monitoring student attendance and creating a climate of trust among students, staff and parents. The principal, acting on the Learning Environment Survey's results, has vastly improved communication with parents.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The Choir Academy of Harlem	△	➤	✓	+
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, DYO, 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