

# **Quality Review Report 2009-2010**

**George Gershwin Intermediate School**

**Middle School 166**

**800 Van Siclen Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11207**

**Principal: Maria Ortega**

**Dates of review: December 17-18, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Martin Weinstein**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

George Gershwin Intermediate School is a middle school with 568 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 76% Black, 23% Hispanic, and 1% White. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 89.9%.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

The principal's determination to place the school in good standing is embraced with great enthusiasm by the whole school community. As one teacher proudly boasts, "We are on the brink of doing wonderful things here, and with minor tweaking, we will get that sought after 'A' on the next Progress Report." Collaborative teacher teams on all grade levels and across all subjects carefully analyze a diverse range of informal and formative data to unearth longitudinal school-wide trends as well as current information profiling student performance. However, the analysis of data is more closely and consistently pursued by teachers of English language arts and math than in other subject areas. In order to increase the proficiency development of English language learners, teacher teams have introduced three distinct academic programs for all grades. School leaders leave no stone unturned, and with great purposefulness ensure that all student subgroups receive finely attuned instruction through the institution of gender specific, college preparatory, collaborative team teaching and mixed achievement-level classes. Apart from these classes, numerous interventions, school-wide enrichment opportunities and extracurricular programs further motivate, deepen understanding and provide the impetus for students to attend school on a regular basis. However, project-based learning products, demonstrating cross-curricular relationships are not evident in some classrooms. Students benefit from differentiated instruction which is a common practice throughout the school and with little teacher prompting, students engage in rich and accountable oral discussions closely linked to a wealth of varied and engaging tasks.

Teachers know their students well and students understand the long- and short-term goals the school has in place for them. Although, most students receive valuable feedback on their written work, and are aware of the precise next steps for improvement, this is not yet consistent throughout the school. The monthly distribution of detailed and highly comprehensive grade-specific curriculum maps, newsletters, progress reports, as well as extensive parent conferences and ARIS parent-link training enable parents to understand their children's strengths and weaknesses and is providing them with the requisite skills to monitor their children's progress. For this reason, parents express the firm belief that they are integral stakeholders in their children's development. School leaders review monthly self-reflection compositions written by teachers and teachers examine the self-reflection pieces submitted by students to further assess their progress towards identified goals. There is not yet a consistent means of gauging the effectiveness and progress teachers and leadership teams are making in their monitoring work. Extensive professional development opportunities are well promoted. In addition, ongoing professional development surveys identify and support the interests of teachers, leading to relevant learning experiences for all members of the school community.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal is acutely aware of the needs of the school's growing English language learner population and has strategically developed programs to service and ensure these students' learning goals are addressed.
  - Instructional support programs such as Read 180, System 44 and Achieve 3000 have been customized to support and closely match the individual learning needs of English language learners. Adaptive and instructional software, high-interest literature, direct instruction in reading, writing and vocabulary, and foundational phonics for the most struggling readers is leading to mastery of skills and sustained proficiency.
- Students are highly engaged and motivated by a wealth of academic and extracurricular programs and activities that have been carefully tailored to accelerate the academic and psycho-social growth of all student subgroups.
  - High performing students are immersed in Advanced Integrated Algebra classes to continuously challenge their learning needs. Additionally, all students participating in these classes successfully meet the requirements of the Integrated Algebra Regents and accrue high school credits. A wide range of students are exposed: to robotics, "pod casting", the use of a well equipped recording studio, a state of the art computer lab as well as a preponderance of classroom based SMART board and laptop technologies. Such good facilities and programs are a driving impetus that motivates even the strongest students to delve into their studies with deeper interest and to apply their basic skills to research and project-based investigations.
  - Level 2 students, the school's largest subgroup, are strategically placed in AVID, a highly structured college preparatory program that increases organizational skills and time-on-task efficiency through: Socratic Seminars, Costa's Level of Inquiry, the utilization of extensive graphic organizers and Cornell note-taking instructional modalities. This highly motivating program is enabling students to see their personal potential and work towards even greater levels of success.
- School leaders and faculty collaboratively gather and analyze a wide range of informal and formative data to study student learning outcomes at the school level.
  - Learning Directions augments the school leaders' and teachers' regular utilization of ARIS by furnishing grade, class and student-specific skill deficiency information. This information is directly linked to Acuity, Acuity ITA's, Performance Series, and New York State simulation tests in English language arts, math, science and social studies and provides the groundwork to shape curricular and instructional decisions.
  - The consistent ongoing cabinet meetings enable school leaders to actively examine and analyze data to evaluate attendance protocols and other organizational decisions.

- Teacher teams effectively use a diverse range of tools to analyze and organize data so that information about trends in student performance, especially relating to targeted subgroups, is readily available for making curricular and instructional decisions.
  - Teacher teams carefully utilize the disaggregated data, provided by Learning Directions, on Acuity Student Goal sheets. They then develop differentiated instructional and intervention strategies during the course of weekly meetings. This enables teachers to utilize various lenses to obtain an accurate perspective of the individual student's strengths and areas of need.
- Differentiated support of teachers reflects the school's commitment to build capacity in teachers at all developmental levels.
  - Daily learning walks, teacher interest surveys, observation snapshots and the review of current formative assessments in Acuity and Performance Series serve as the basis for planning strategic professional development opportunities. As a result, instructional methodologies and techniques sessions target the identified needs of all teachers.
- Teachers are afforded numerous opportunities to engage in self-reflective practice to ensure their leadership growth.
  - Preparation periods are purposefully scheduled to afford teachers the opportunity to evaluate their pedagogical practices through the continuous practice of self-reflection, leading to the development of refined instructional goals. Frequent consultation between school leaders and teachers in this process further ensures that teaching strategies have a positive impact on student learning outcomes.
  - On all grade levels, teachers facilitate the school's core inquiry teams, as well as teacher teams, on a rotational basis. This practice has empowered teachers to act as key decision makers in the academic and psycho-social growth of their students.

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

- Fully entrench a strong interdisciplinary curriculum, including project-based learning in all classrooms and on all grade levels.
  - While project-based learning, which is intricately woven into the Core Knowledge curriculum and the Advancement Via Individual Determination classes, provides many students in grades 7 and 8 with an appreciation of cross-curricular interrelationships, this is not the case in every classroom. Consequently, not all students are profiting from these dynamic and inspiring learning opportunities.
  - In grade six there is limited evidence of project-based work products in many subject areas. Therefore, students on this grade level are not as well exposed to a more comprehensive range of learning experiences as students in the upper grades, leading to limited and routine work products.

- Establish throughout a uniform means of reflection on student progress in content areas to compliment the good teacher teams' utilization of a wide range of data sources.
  - Several social studies and science teachers rely on ad hoc data sources. Consequently, these teachers are not as well positioned as English language arts and math teachers to develop differentiated teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students.
  - Assessment data is widely utilized by English language arts and math teachers. However, other subject area teachers do not utilize assessment data for the planning of instructional practice. This limits the study and understanding of student performance trends with which to accelerate student's progress.
- Provide greater consistency in teacher feedback to students regarding their academic performance and their next steps needed to improve academic achievement.
  - Student work in both regular and special education classrooms is replete with detailed teacher comments. However, small pockets of limited teacher feedback to students were found on pieces of student work. Therefore, insufficient numbers of students are unaware of the necessary steps needed to reach targeted goals.
  - Teacher feedback, to some degree, is restricted to performance level numeration and not linked to discernible rubric criteria. Thus, clear expectations for student achievement are not consistently in place for all students.
- Ensure greater uniformity in the school leaders' monitoring, evaluation and modification of systems employed to guarantee school wide interim and long-term goals are met.
  - Although, teachers utilize a well-equipped arsenal of progress monitoring tools to track and chart student progress, as well as set appropriate long- and short-term goals, school leaders have not instituted a systematic tracking system to check and evaluate the effectiveness of the teachers' progress in the monitoring of their students. As a result, some teachers are not receiving next-step support to either maintain or improve their assessment of student progress.
  - The principal has not implemented a written or computerized documentation system to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of her assistant principals in their supervision of teachers. This limits effectiveness of school-wide supervisory support.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

<b>School name: George Gershwin Intermediate School</b>	△	➤	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?				<b>X</b>
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			<b>X</b>	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				<b>X</b>
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				<b>X</b>
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?				<b>X</b>
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?			X				
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X				
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X				
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				X			
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?				X			
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				X			
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>