

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

Humanities Preparatory Academy

High School 605

**351 West 18th Street
New York
NY 10011**

Principal: Julie Conason

Dates of review: January 7 - 8, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Elaine Gorman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Humanities Preparatory Academy is a high school with 182 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 28% Black, 53% Hispanic, 13% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 13% special education students, but there are no English language learners. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 83.8%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Humanities Preparatory Academy is a small school that serves both incoming 9th grade students and students who transfer to begin anew. All constituencies commend the school for its extremely warm and trusting environment grounded on core values that have endured from the school's beginning as a program. The school is a portfolio school requiring students to take the English Regents and demonstrate mastery of state standards through a series of performance-based tasks in a personalized set of course offerings. Course offerings consistently provide students with opportunities to undertake research, analyze current issues, collaborate, and self-reflect. The development of student voice is embedded in robust writing expectations and through student leadership in advisories and governance. Students know that the staff expect them to achieve at high levels and to be ready for college. They appreciate that the staff are always available to support them in class and after school. Students are known by name and feel well accepted as individuals.

An exceptionally committed and self-reflective staff has developed the practice of consensus governance and distributive leadership, which is embedded in the work of the school. Collaboration around curriculum, instruction, and students is both organic and planned through staff retreats, regular staff meetings, critical friends' groups, and emerging inquiry. Goal setting for students occurs during the entrance process and through individual conferencing by reviewing transcripts and progress toward commencement tasks. The school is furthering curriculum development in science through a vertical alignment intended to provide a model for the school. Regular review of curriculum takes place using the results of mid-terms and performance-based tasks; however, the analysis of results is more organic and lacks necessary systems. Additionally, curriculum mapping of major concepts across content areas has yet to be done to further assure that students can make connections and apply what they have learnt. Professional development is multi-faceted and is well aligned to school goals.

Student-led conferences have provided an important opportunity for student ownership for their work and parent engagement. The school is beginning to use a computerized system that has the potential to further facilitate internal communications of student outcomes and a vehicle to assure student and parents have current information. Parents recognize that they will need training to fully understand what information is available and what it means. At the current time, the school sends home a variety of documents, including syllabi with learning targets and the results of student-led conferences, but neither ARIS Parent Link nor school-specific program is utilized.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school maintains an exceptionally trusting and respectful environment where students are engaged in their learning and appreciate the high level of student voice in classroom activities and school decisions. (1.4)
 - The school's Core Values of respect for humanity, diversity, intellect, truth, peace, justice, and democracy are embedded across the school and impact interactions within classrooms and in mediating disciplinary issues through the fairness committee.
 - An age-appropriate advisory system and town halls provide student-led lessons informed by the needs of individuals and groups of students, such as the advisory for all young women, where students challenge each other on the consequences of their actions on gender-related issues.
- An exceptionally committed and self-reflective staff provides well-differentiated project-based learning that provides students consistent opportunities to undertake independent research, analyze current issues, collaborate, and self-reflect. (1.2)
 - Performance-based tasks required for graduation, in lieu of Regents exams, require extensive research and robust writing standards. Students appreciate having choice of topics and substantive feedback in preparation.
 - In collaboration with the New York Performance Standards Consortium, the staff have written substantive rubrics to guide instructional practice and to assess student outcomes. Content learning targets for students align to commencement expectations. Many teachers' daily instruction evidences this work.
- The school community shares a vision that guides the implementation of focused goals that are embedded in documents, including the Comprehensive Educational Plan and professional development plan. (3.1, 3.3)
 - The school improvement team and staff have together identified the goals of strengthening advisories, expanding the science curriculum, implementing student-led conferences, and increasing use of instructional technology, including a new robotics program. These goals are informed by a review of previous accountability reports and comments by alumni.
 - The staff retreats three times a year to reflect on the results of the current performance-based tasks and to determine the needs of currently enrolled students. Curricular modifications and professional development are informed by these regular reviews of student work.
- Building on the analysis to prepare the Comprehensive Educational Plan, the school community makes consensus-based organizational decisions and identifies funding sources to support improvements in teaching and learning. (1.3, 3.1)

- The school leadership team and the staff have committed new Title I monies to hire an additional science teacher to provide a full sequence in the sciences, previously unavailable for students interested in science-related majors in college.
- A large grant from the City Council's office has been used to begin the implementation of the school goal to enhance technology within classrooms and to further communications among constituencies. This goal is an extension of the reading initiative of last year and current efforts to deepen differentiation in classrooms.
- Professional collaboration and distributive leadership are high priorities with faculty welcoming multifaceted professional development to strengthen instruction and improve learning outcomes. (4.2.c, 4.3)
 - The principal is actively encouraging distributed leadership by working with key teacher leaders in a "coordinating committee", including the professional development coordinator, the coordinator of assessment, and the coordinator of culture and character. The coordinating committee not only allows greater faculty voice, but further assures alignment between student outcomes and professional development.
 - An inquiry group studying African American young men has been informed by their instructional practices, their work with other schools, and research. They presented the research and findings to the faculty. Their process should serve as a model for other content teams that are working hard but are not as precise in the inquiry approach.
- High expectations for college readiness are supported through extensive internal opportunities and external partnerships for students to develop academically and socially. (4.4)
 - The school maintains its relationship with the Coalition of Essential Schools and is in fact has been a CES Mentor School since 2005, supporting other small schools to formulate philosophy and initiate operations. Partnerships with groups such as New York City Outward Bound, Health Corps, and The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center allow students to practice these values and considered to be 21st Century required skills, including mutual respect, cooperation, and service.
 - In an Annenberg Institute for School Reform publication, Safety with Dignity, the school is recognized for providing opportunities for students to voice their point of view and provide feedback to their peers and adults. These opportunities include town hall meetings where topics range from environmental racism to police in schools.

What the school needs to improve

- Implement structures assuring annual goals for teachers that inform regular written feedback on formal and informal observations by the instructionally strong school leader. (4.1)
 - Although the principal regularly provides informative feedback to all teachers, with specific emphasis on those new to the profession, only one

teacher has received written observations this year. This prevents them from reflecting even more deeply on their practice.

- Teachers have not been asked to write annual goals nor has the principal provided specific written goals based on teachers' performance last year. This prevents the principal from monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional development in a rigorous way.
- Extend the promising practice of student learning targets in individual courses and the emerging development of vertically aligned curriculum through curriculum mapping to further concept development across content. (1.1, 5.1)
 - Although the school places a high value on learning in depth, which is fostered by a unique curriculum and performance assessment, it has yet to link major concepts across the curriculum in order to further the application of content knowledge.
 - The vertical alignment of the science curriculum is intended to be a model for the school, but there is not yet a written long-term plan for this development in other content areas.
- Deepen the systematic approach to the gathering and analysis of evidence at whole school, grade, and individual student level to further extend the understanding of patterns and trends in order to take timely action. (2.3)
 - The school accurately describes its processes as more “endemic than codified” which limits its ability to deepen its understanding of patterns and trends in order to make strategic decisions.
 - The school maintains folders for each student on their performance-based tasks and emerging periodic assessments, but there is not yet a consistent system analyzing either all work of each student or patterns of groups of students.
- Build on emerging practices to expand communication and collaboration with parents in order to increase their capacity to assist in their child's learning and to enable them to track their child's progress towards attaining set goals. (2.4)
 - The school is beginning to use EChalk as a tool to communicate within the building, but has yet to expand its use as a tool to communicate with parents in order to help them understand student performance. Additionally, training on the use of ARIS has not reached many parents.
 - The school has implemented the promising practice of periodic student-led conferences, where strengths and weaknesses are discussed and the teacher or staff member stands in as surrogate if a parent cannot attend. However, the school has yet to fully connect student commencement goals with this process in order for families to measure progress.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| School name: Humanities Preparatory Academy | △ | ▷ | ✓ | + |
| Overall QR Score | | | X | |
| Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions. | | | | |
| <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? | | | X | |
| 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? | | | | X |
| 1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs? | | | X | |
| 1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults? | | | | X |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 1 | | | X | |
| 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. | | | | |
| <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? | | | X | |
| 2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level? | | | X | |
| 2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends? | | X | | |
| 2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes? | | | X | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 2 | | | X | |

| 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. | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|---|--|---|-------------------|---|-----------------------|
| <i>To what extent does the school ...</i> | △ | ➤ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 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 | | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 3 | | | X | | | | |
| 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. | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i> | △ | ➤ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 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 | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 4 | | | X | | | | |
| 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. | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i> | △ | ➤ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 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 | | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 5 | | | X | | | | |
| Quality Review Scoring Key | | | | | | | |
| △ | Underdeveloped | ➤ | Underdeveloped with Proficient Features | ✓ | Proficient | + | Well Developed |