



**Department of  
Education**

*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Washington Heights Academy**

**06M366**

**202 Sherman Avenue  
New York  
NY 10034**

**Principal: Renzo Martinez**

**Date of review: December 18, 2014  
Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor**

## The School Context

Washington Heights Academy is an elementary school with 472 students from grade pre-K through grade 6. The school population comprises 3% Black, 92% Hispanic, 3% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 94%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</b>
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
---------------------------	---	----------------	-----------------------

### Findings

Weekly teacher team meetings allow all teachers across the school to regularly engage in collaborative planning, data analysis and decision making linked to schoolwide goals and initiatives.

### Impact

Teacher team use of protocols for investigation of strengths and needs in student work and data, along with teacher voice in school level decisions, contributes to improvement of teacher practice and student mastery of learning goals.

### Supporting Evidence

- Minutes of team meetings indicate that all teachers meet regularly and engage in the collection, disaggregation and analysis of data from assessments such as standardized assessments, Measures of Student Learning performance tasks, Developmental Reading Assessments/Running Records, chapter tests and end of unit assessments.
- The principal used spreadsheets to demonstrate that the school disaggregates assessment data to monitor the performance of individual students as well as subgroups of students. For example, the data showed that third grade students' performance on standardized assessments lagged behind that of students tested in other grades so the school has implemented targeted interventions, including smaller class size during reading and math periods and after school and Saturday programs, helping all students to improve mastery of grade level content and skills.
- Observation of a teacher team meeting showed that a "Learning from Student Work" protocol and shared readings from *Advancing Formative Assessment in Every Classroom*, guide teacher teams in analyzing student work, discussing implications for teacher practice and making curricular and instructional adjustments based on students' learning needs. For example, one team analyzed samples of student writing and elicited recommendations from peers (use of exemplars, modeling essay via projector, and more use of graphic organizers) to improve the students' writing skills.
- Teachers interviewed reported that they have a strong voice in school level decision making, with peers serving in roles such as Curriculum Coordinator, Data & Assessment Specialist, Lead Teachers, members of the School Cabinet, United Federation of Teachers' Consultation Committee and the Safety and Professional Development Committees, as well as members of the Measures of Student Learning and Professional Planning teams. Through these roles, teachers implemented a professional development survey and collaborated with administrators in using the feedback to develop a schoolwide Professional Learning plan for all staff.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

### Findings

While some teachers use teaching strategies that engage students at all levels, most lessons viewed neither incorporated rigorous tasks nor immersed all students in deep peer-to-peer discussions linked to complex texts.

### Impact

There were missed opportunities to deepen learning by all students via challenging tasks and discussions that consistently demand higher order thinking across disciplines and result in high quality student work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- In a few classrooms, teachers assigned rigorous Common Core aligned tasks, with students citing evidence to respond to questions and/or reporting on findings from inquiry based tasks. For example, in a fourth grade science classroom, groups of students engaged in hands on investigation of the effect of varied wing sizes (5, 10 or 15 centimeters) on the speed and slope of an airplane in motion. They used worksheets with directions and questions to complete a lab report and shared findings with the whole class using academic vocabulary (variable, intervals, increments).
- Lessons observed did not consistently demonstrate use of multiple entry points to meet the diverse needs of students, as most students worked on the same task. For example, in a fifth grade classroom, although the teacher provided differentiated support for groups of students, they all read the same text (*George's Secret Key to the Universe*) from which they copied words and phrases onto a graphic organizer.
- Few lessons offered opportunities for high level peer to peer discussions amongst students. For example, while the teacher in a second grade classroom guided students in using a rubric to examine features of an opinion piece, and then facilitated students' discussions of strengths and weaknesses in their writing and that of a peer, students in a sixth grade classroom were minimally engaged in discussion during their lesson. Although seated in groups, most of these students worked independently for 10 minutes, trying to use a graphic organizer to show how to compare two ratios from one word problem.
- Some tasks made few demands on students, some of whom quietly listened to the teacher or to responses from the few peers who were called upon, or read excerpts of texts to answer a few low-level questions by filling in information on a graphic organizer, or copying words or phrases from a text to an index card or post-it. For example, in a third grade class, students sat reading independently about Africa or Asia, and used an index card or post -it to "copy down any word we don't know and look for the meaning" or "write a question and then try to find the answer in the book". In addition, student work in folders viewed showed a predominance of worksheets that did not challenge students to explain their thinking and most classroom bulletin boards did not contain work samples that illustrated in-depth authentic student writing.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-------------------

### Findings

The school continuously uses student work and data to develop and revise curricula, with targeted focus on alignment of units of study to content and Common Core standards.

### Impact

Across disciplines, curricula reflects targeted focus on ensuring that all students have access to challenging tasks that support college and career readiness goals and expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- A school-based Curriculum Coordinator works with staff in developing unit plans that show applications of the instructional shifts. Tasks offer students opportunities to engage in learning activities such as composing explanations of inferences drawn from texts, solving complex problems in math, and preparing summaries of reading selections.
- The school uses Common Core aligned curricula such as *Core Knowledge* for pre K students, *Go Math* for grades K-6, *Ready Gen* for grades K-5, and *Expeditionary Learning* for Grade 6 English Language Arts. In addition, teacher teams have created curriculum overviews that reflect Universal Design for Learning principles and further support students' access to tasks grounded in relevant content area standards.
- Teachers at team meetings described adjustments in curricula and instruction to increase student learning. For example, one teacher noted that team analysis of student writing samples resulted in the inclusion of guided writing frames to improve sentence structure in writing done by students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.
- The school's curricula incorporate specific instructional materials for English Language Learners and students with disabilities. These include manipulatives, technology based learning, interactive Smart board activities and the use of Think Central, Maxscholar Reading Program, LearnZillion and Reading A-Z, as tools for enrichment, intervention and differentiation of instruction.
- School curricula also include coverage of topics and skills linked to a Responsive Classroom Initiative and a Middle School Leadership Advisory program designed to build students' academic and social-emotional skills, including high school, college and career readiness skills. For example a "College and Career Readiness Car" features college and career readiness skills (including persistence, engagement, self-regulation, communication/collaboration and organization/work habits) for students to master as they move from grade to grade.

**Findings**

Analysis of student work and a variety of other student assessment data highlights students' progress towards learning goals and informs adjustments to curricula and instruction.

**Impact**

Teachers and students have data with which to formulate action plans, including teacher interventions and curricula adjustments that address specific individual student needs and accelerate student achievement.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers implement common assessments, including Measures of Student Learning baseline assessments, Developmental Reading Assessments, Running Records, guided reading conferences, baseline writing assessments, end of chapter and end of unit assessments in evaluating student's proficiency and content knowledge related to performance tasks across grades and subjects.
- In keeping with the school wide instructional focus of "Using Assessment in Instruction", administrators and teachers collaboratively analyze student work products, discuss findings, and identify instructional strategies to support student progress toward goals across grades and subjects. For example, the principal used a variety of documents, including spreadsheets with data for individual as well as subgroups of students, to show levels of achievement across assessments. The principal also described adjustments to curricula, such as modifications to *Ready Gen* curricula to create more time for guided reading and balance narrative and informational writing, based on data. Teachers also stated that they use assessment data to form guided reading groups with differentiated tasks.
- During the teacher team meetings, several teachers noted that based on data from end of unit assessments, they at times re-teach specific concepts to improve students' mastery of targeted skills. For example, one teacher stated that analyses of student work identified weaknesses in writing effective introductions for essays so teachers brainstormed and collaborated to incorporate new strategies in re-teaching for student mastery of this skill area.
- During classroom visits, most teachers engaged in ongoing assessment of learning via activities such as discussions of Do Nows, direct questioning followed by hand signals from students as a check for understanding, check-ins via group or one-to-one conferencing, and reviews of classwork. In addition during the student meeting some students reported that they use rubrics and checklists from their teachers to assess their own progress on unit tasks.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-------------------

### Findings

The school communicates high expectations for teaching and learning across the school community, and implements multiple structures for their attainment.

### Impact

Communication of and targeted supports for high expectations to be met by staff, families and students have deepened knowledge of schoolwide expectations and accountability for student progress in meeting the expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- A staff handbook communicates high expectations for professionalism, instruction and communication for all staff. In addition various memoranda, data collection and reporting sheets and templates for analyzing student work, further specify the school's high expectations. For example, instructional memoranda explicitly state expectations linked to the targeted components of the Danielson Framework and the instructional focus across the school.
- The school's professional development plan indicates that all teachers receive ongoing training in both planning and delivering rigorous instruction and implementing social-emotional learning initiatives. For example, along with training in topics such as "effective questioning" and "using assessment in instruction", teachers receive training to implement a Responsive Classroom Program and a Middle School Leadership Advisory program designed to build college and career readiness skills across grades.
- Administrators use conference notes, reviews of unit and lesson plans, feedback from observations, analyses of student work and other performance data to hold staff accountable for meeting or exceeding the expectations. Teachers reported that administrators visit their classroom regularly and follow up with support and feedback.
- A *Family Handbook* is used to communicate to parents the school's high expectations for students' academic achievement and personal development, as well as active family participation in school activities. The handbook, along with newsletters, bulletins, meetings and workshops, provides information about academic and personal behavior expectations, and offers tips to help families support their children in learning at home. The principal also shared that a "College and Career Readiness Car," outlining college and career readiness skills for students, is given to families to support their understanding of college and career readiness expectations for their children.
- During the parent meeting, some parents praised the school for high expectations and added that they are kept abreast of their children's progress toward those expectations, via phone calls and emails from some teachers, one to one conferences during Open School week or the weekly parent outreach period and via recognition ceremonies that celebrate students' accomplishments.