

# Quality Review Report

## 2016-2017

**Washington Heights Academy**

**Elementary - Middle School 06M366**

**202 Sherman Ave  
Manhattan  
NY 10034**

**Principal: Renzo Martinez**

**Dates of Review:  
February 7, 2017 - February 8, 2017**

**Lead Reviewer: Mitchell Center**

# The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Celebration** to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Focus** to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as **Additional Finding**. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

## Information about the School

Washington Heights Academy serves students in grade K through grade 8. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm>.

## School Quality Ratings

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area	Rating
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 Finding</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>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Proficient</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 Finding</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## School Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area	Rating
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults	Area of Celebration	Well Developed
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Additional Finding	Well Developed

### Systems for Improvement

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area	Rating
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products	Additional Finding	Proficient
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community	Additional Finding	Proficient
4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection	Area of Focus	Proficient
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Finding	Well Developed
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS	Additional Finding	Proficient

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

The school has systems in place to ensure that every child is known well by at least one adult, and that social-emotional supports are cultivated and informed by a theory of action.

### Impact

Formal and informal structures provide students with the time and space needed to share feelings, build social skills, and play a role in school improvement efforts. There is an inclusive culture at the school and programs at the school ensure that students develop the academic habits required for success in school and in life.

### Supporting Evidence

- In grades kindergarten through five, classrooms implement the Responsive Classroom approach to building class and school culture. The moment students walk in the door they are greeted by an adult who makes them feel welcome, and the language used by teachers is supportive and solution-oriented, rather than reactive and punitive. Staff meet regularly to discuss student needs, and adults in the building look out for and check in with specific students who require additional support. A student shared, "Someone always notices if you come to school sad or mad. They'll always pull you aside to talk with you and see what you need." Teachers and students also referenced the schools Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports approach to conflict resolution and peer-to-peer conflict resolution that has students solving many of their own problems.
- The middle school advisory program is based on the Engaging Schools program, and provides students with the time and space they need to focus on academic, personal and social goals. Classrooms are split in half for advisory to increase the level of individualized support students receive. In an eighth-grade advisory, students sat in a circle reflecting on their day and week. The advisor displayed several images and quotations for students to choose from and they shared which ones represented their current feelings and thoughts. Students took turns, listened intently and shared openly and honestly about some of their challenges, including the stress of waiting to learn about which high school they would be attending. Students were supported by their peers and the advisor leading them, and all voices were welcomed. These advisory periods ensure that every child is known well by at least one adult, and that regular check-ins with these adults are happening throughout the year.
- The school supports students with academic behaviors that are conducive to college and career readiness. The acronym ROCKS (respect, organization, caring, knowledge and safety) is used to build a cohesive understanding of the behaviors expected of all students and adults in the building. All students shared that they feel safe and well cared for, with several using the term "family" and "community" when describing their school. For older students, a College and Career Readiness (CARS) program is in place to support with high school articulation and with helping students visualize their futures in institutions of higher learning.

## Area of Focus

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders provide specific feedback based on frequent observations and analysis of student work, though cycles are not yet strategic. Feedback is strengths-based and focused on schoolwide goals, however feedback does not yet consistently support individual teacher goals.

### Impact

Teacher feedback supports teacher reflection and elevates teacher practices throughout the building, though in some cases growth is limited by lack of flexibility in regards to teacher-specific needs outside of schoolwide goals.

### Supporting Evidence

- Feedback to teachers captures strengths, challenges and clear next steps using the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Teachers and administrators both emphasized their focus on supporting the development of teachers. One teacher shared, “Feedback is given in a positive manner. I welcome post-observation discussions. They are true discussions, they don’t just tell us what to do.” Observation records reflect practices that note low-inference observations of the classroom, strengths in teacher practices and clear next steps for teachers at all levels of effectiveness. For example, a teacher rated highly effective in questioning and discussion techniques was encouraged to think about how the use of wait time would have allowed discussion partners to explain their thinking to deepen the thinking of all learners.
- Feedback given to teachers by school leaders focuses on schoolwide instructional practices, and administrators work to build coherence across the school in the implementation of instructional strategies and implementation of the instructional shifts. For example, feedback to several teachers focused on the school’s goals of using specific protocols to deepen student engagement through discussions and scaffolded exercises. This specific and coherent feedback allows teachers to reflect independently and with their peers about their implementation of common instructional practices. However, there were missed opportunities to focus on the support of individual teacher goals in addition to schoolwide initiatives. For example, a teacher observed who had issues with classroom management did not receive feedback in this area because the feedback was focused on schoolwide goals having to do with assessment and student engagement.
- Consistent and frequent cycles of observation by the administrators support teachers with a series of informal and formal observations. Student work is cited in the observational notes, and is reflected upon during post-observation conferences. The feedback is concise, connected to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and is mostly effective. For example, feedback to a teacher focused on assessment offered specific suggestions: “Please make sure to use a conferring tablet when meeting with your students. Use the conferring sheet to document and monitor what students are doing.” This feedback offers support for the teacher to improve. However, although there are frequent cycles of classroom observations and analysis of student work and data, these cycles are not yet strategically planned to support teachers based on need.

## Additional Finding

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

A cycle of instruction and assessment informs the lesson and unit plans created by teachers and ensures that they are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. Lessons are designed to meet the needs of all learners with an emphasis on collaboration and the shared construction of knowledge.

### Impact

All students are engaged in curricula and tasks that promote college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- Lessons and academic tasks include the integration of the instructional shifts across subject areas. For example, an eighth grade English Language Arts (ELA) task asked students to cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as implicitly. In a sixth grade ELA class, the criteria for success was written as “I can engage effectively with my peers to analyze, discuss and build on new ideas about a literary text and write about them in a style that is appropriate to the task and audience.” In this regard, teachers are working to ensure that their tasks reflect the instructional shifts, and that the criteria for success is written in a way that students can understand and fully access.
- A review of pacing calendars, unit plans, lesson plans and tasks integrate Webb’s *Depth of Knowledge* questions including, “How do writers create interesting stories?” and “How does understanding place value help us identify and count patterns more effectively?” Similar questions were viewed in curricula across content areas and grades. Unit plans consist of tiered vocabulary to support English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. For example, in one lesson plan, the teacher included separate sets of words for groups of students and in an Instructional Co-Teaching (ICT) classroom students were using three different leveled texts. Additionally, the core curricula used by the school contains modified support in the program guides so that a diversity of learners can access the material.
- Teachers use consistent lesson plan formats that reveal the role student work and data play in planning and curricula design. A clear Success Criteria is noted in lesson plans that shows teachers are thinking about how students will show they are learning the material, and that students are expected to collaborate and share knowledge with one another. For instance, one lesson plan stated the success criteria as “I will know I am on target when I can construct a Peer-Teaching-Peer lesson plan with my group members to teach my peers one of the Unit 2 Focus ELA skills as it pertains to my chapter of *Dragon Wings*.” In other places there is evidence that teachers are reflecting on exit tickets to guide next steps in future lessons.
- Teachers review student data regularly to make decisions about instructional groups and text selection, providing additional challenges and supports as needed based on what they learn about students. Looking at lesson plans across grades and subjects, one could see that every template includes a lesson objective, an essential question, a clear model, a protocol for engaging students such as think-ink-share, a space for differentiation or grouping, and an end-of-lesson assessment, often in the form of an exit slip.

## Additional Finding

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Teachers provide multiple entry points to students by implementing a variety of engagement strategies across grades and subjects.

### Impact

Group engagement strategies and talk protocols support the involvement of all students in learning, providing challenges for students ready to go ahead as well as support for struggling learners. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

### Supporting Evidence

- In a sixth grade ELA class students were reading *Escape to Freedom* and engaged in a “back to back, face to face” exercise which emphasized active listening and critical thinking. Students paired with a partner, back to back, and listened to a question posed by the teacher. When instructed, they then turned around and began having a conversation with another. After each question and conversation, the teacher reflected with the students urging them to site evidence from the text to support their answers. The students then switched partners and went through the process again with a new partner. In this way, students all had ample opportunities to practice listening, thinking and articulating their answers. For students with disabilities and English Language Learners, the wait time embedded in back to back face to face is helpful for processing, and the intimate one on one conversations they have allow them to construct knowledge and practice language in a safe space. The teacher, after hearing kids talking in partners, could then decide who would share more broadly with the group. This process of allowing kids the space to grapple in pairs and small groups, and then share more broadly with the larger class was seen across the building with a range of protocols.
- In a second grade ELA class a teacher reviewed the criteria for success with students. Students were asked to tell the teacher how they would know they were successful at the end of the lesson. After reflecting with the teacher, students were asked to think, pair, and then share with a partner. One student shared, “I will know I’m successful if I can give answers using text evidence and features.” Another shared that she’ll be able to answer questions about Susan B. Anthony, who they were reading about. By having the carefully crafted think time, and practice bouncing ideas off of peers, students are more likely to engage in the lessons they are participating in.
- The think-ink-share strategy was seen across several classrooms. In a math class, students were urged to think by reading the problem the first time for the gist, and to then read it again using the CUBES (circle, underline, box, evaluate, solve) problem solving approach. Then students were to ink by writing down all of their thinking. Finally, the share is intended for students to collaborate and combine their work with their partners. This iterative, structured process provides students with a framework for problem solving that honors their own thinking and ideas, while also encouraging them to listen to one another, and to synthesize individual thoughts into something even better that the group creates. This practice was seen across multiple levels of math classrooms.
- Students are provided with tools in their classrooms that promote independent work and higher-level thinking. Task cards in buckets filled with markers and posters were seen in several classes. In one bucket were conversation stems aligned to Bloom’s Taxonomy. Useful verbs and sentence stems are provided at the remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating levels. In this way, students are taught to become self-aware of the increasingly complex levels.

## Additional Finding

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

A strong culture of assessment is woven into the fabric of the school. Rubrics are widely utilized to help students gauge their own learning, and ongoing checks for understanding are frequently built into individual lesson plans across all grades and subjects.

### Impact

Teachers' consistent use of assessments at various levels has helped ensure that student needs are being targeted and that all students are aware of their own individual strengths and growth areas.

### Supporting Evidence

- Classroom visits evidenced the use of exit tickets, extensive teacher conferencing, and other forms of checks for understanding, such as hand gestures like fist-to-five, thumb-o-meter, and students holding up work products, so that the teacher can see how many students completed the task with understanding. The stick-it-together math protocol has been extended to ELA and is an example of how teachers are constantly assessing student understanding of material. Students work together to construct knowledge and go through a series of refining and improving responses to posed questions. They stick it together for a final answer or to summarize their collective thinking. This protocol was observed in multiple grade levels in both math and ELA.
- Students regularly use self- and peer-evaluation tools in conjunction with standardized rubrics to reflect on their learning. This is followed with teacher conversation and feedback on next steps. During the student meeting, all students were able to articulate the expectations for the task they brought, the feedback they received, how they improved the selected piece and how they can continue to improve.
- Students reported receiving feedback from their peers on rubrics, and shared that peer-to-peer feedback is a regular practice across the school. In a third grade math class, a teacher asked "Who could provide specific feedback here? What would you rate this group?" Student responses were candid and accurate. One student said, "I would rate them a 2 because their solution was correct and because they used mathematical language." This is an example of students providing one another feedback, but also providing the teacher with another check for understanding.
- A range of summative and formative assessments are used to gauge student learning. Reading Reform and the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) are used in early grades to determine student reading level. By identifying students' precise reading level at regular intervals, the school is able to provide students with books at their independent and instructional level. In math, *iReady* and end of unit assessments are utilized so students, teachers and families have a clear understanding of what material has been mastered, and where areas for growth remain. Teachers use assessment data to further refine and tailor instructional materials which has lead to increases in student achievement.
- The school has a consistent approach to communicating mastery and instructional levels in regard to writing skills. Using different colors of paper, pink and yellow, the school is capable of communicating to parents what students can do on their own versus what they can do with support. At regular intervals, students create a piece that is on pink paper that showcases what they can do with support from an adult, and a yellow piece that communicates what they can do completely on their own. In this way, students and families gain a clear understanding of student achievement.

## Additional Finding

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Teacher teams regularly meet to analyze student work and progress, and a rotating lead teacher structure reflects the school's commitment to distributive leadership.

### Impact

A strong teaming structure and effective teacher leadership has led to greater levels of communication across grade levels and subjects, and has increased consistency and outcomes across grades.

### Supporting Evidence

- Well-established teacher inquiry teams meet regularly by grade band in the elementary school or by department in the middle school to look at student work, brainstorm strategies and agree to collective next steps. This cycle was clearly evident in the third and fourth grade inquiry meeting where teachers had a protocol for analyzing student work against a rubric. The teachers, along with the special education teacher, were able to identify key strategies for students to work on, including the OREO protocol for writing (opinion, reason, example, opinion), and a continued focus on transitional words. Teachers in this session were able to identify the strengths in the writing based on previous priorities the group had identified, thus illustrating the collective impact the group is having on student progress.
- Lead teachers represent grade bands in the elementary school and in the upper grades lead teachers are departmentalized by subject level. Lead teachers meet with each other, the leadership and their colleagues and support schoolwide decision making. These lead teachers become the model teachers for others by inviting them in for observations. Lead teachers frequently rotate over the years so various teachers in the school have the opportunity to take on leadership roles that affect student learning across the school. This structure has helped increase the consistency of what is happening from one grade to the next, and because of this consistency from grade to grade, has improved outcomes across the school. For instance, several protocols, such as *give one, get one, move*, and *back to back, face to face*, have been put in place across the school to increase the level of dialogue between students. Because this is happening across the school, students move from grade to grade with knowledge about these various techniques, building on them as they grow in the building.
- A detailed professional development calendar highlights the ways in which distributed leadership is cultivated across the school. Lead teachers gather regularly to support the school's leadership team with schoolwide priorities, such as a session called "Learning from Student Data: Patterns and Implications." Lead teachers share their perspective with leadership in these meetings, learn what is happening with colleagues and classrooms on other grade levels, and share back with team members the highlights of the meetings. The teachers in these meetings make critical instructional decisions about where time and energy should be focused, and how information should be relayed to the broader team. After the "Learning from Data" session was attended by lead teachers, another meeting with the same name was scheduled for each grade band. This practice was seen repeatedly in documentation of professional development plans, and was discussed by teachers in a variety of settings.