

Case Study: Public School A

SNAPSHOT OF A SCHOOL

Atmosphere and Academic Performance

The School is a Pre-K through fifth grade school located in Harlem near Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard. The school is in a large sturdy 1950s building that is brightly lit and spacious. The hallways are clean and amply decorated with student artwork. The office is well organized and efficient. In the 2010-2011 Quality Review (QR) Report, reviewers noted, “the school offers a safe, nurturing environment that is inclusive of students, teachers, and parents, promoting trust and pride in the school community.”¹ The QR report went on to say that school leaders and faculty convey high expectations for student achievement, which is reflected in school wide instructional and behavioral goals. It is a school that sets a high bar, but due to several factors, mainly the high poverty level of its student population and a high percentage of Special Education students, it struggles to meet its mission and goals. When Inside Schools reviewers visited the school in 2004, the reviewers noted that there were several strong teachers but that children with serious emotional or behavioral problems constantly disrupted classes. Their reviewers witnessed students sleeping at their desks or acting out and cursing at the teacher. Since the recent implementation of a behavioral management system, the rate of suspensions has dropped but the principal still says that 15 – 20% of students are exhibiting behavior problems.² In addition, visitors from partner institution, Teachers College (TC), noted friction between teachers in the lower grades and teacher frustration over the lack of family engagement.³

For the 2011-12 academic year, the NYSED identified the school as “In Good Standing” because the school achieved its AYP targets in all categories.⁴ However, on its 2010-2011 NYC DOE Progress Report, the school received an overall grade of “D.” In student performance, the school also received a “D,” but it received a “B” in school environment. The school has the student population groups to achieve additional credit under the category of “Closing the Achievement Gap” on the Progress Report. According to the NYSED, the math and ELA scores for SpEd significantly decreased over time, but the outcomes did allow the school to receive minimal credit for gains made by SETSS students in math and Self-Contained/CTT/SETSS students in ELA.⁵

Demographics

Student enrollment for the 2010-2011 academic year totaled 361 students. The gender breakdown of the student population is equal with 50% male and 50% female students. Sixty-four percent of the students are black and thirty-one percent are Hispanic. In 2010-11 the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch was 94%, which was a decrease of approximately 2% from the prior year. The annual attendance rate has hovered around 90%, varying by one percent from 2007-08 to 2009-2010. The school has a sizeable population of students in transition to and from temporary housing. In 2009-2010, the student stability rate was 77%, which was down 14% from the prior year. However, it went up to 80% in 2010-2011, but this 3% gain is negligible and the school still must cope with the many transitory students and families. In SCHOOL the class size has gone down to 19 in 2010-2011 from 21 in prior years. There is an average of one adult per every 12 students, which is a good ratio for teaching, but indicative of the school’s decreasing enrollment.

For the 2010-2011 academic year, the school had a Special Education (SpEd) population of 87 students or 24% of the student population, well above the citywide average of 15%. The majority of the SpEd students (63%) were in more restrictive self-contained classes, and a total of 14 of these SpEd students were simultaneously classified as

¹ Nina Pitton, Lead Reviewer, the School, New York City Department of Education Quality Review Report, January 28 – 31, 2011.

² <http://insideschools.org/elementary/browse/school/200>

³ Srikanth, Ajay, “Comprehensive Educational Opportunity at the School: A Case Study,” May 8, 2012 (this is a student work conducted under the supervision of Professor Michael Rebell, Teachers College).

⁴ AYP means Adequate Yearly Progress and indicates satisfactory progress by a district or a school toward the goal of proficiency for all students.

⁵ The School New York State School Report Card, Accountability and Overview Report 2010-11, Office of Information and Reporting Services, New York State Education Department, April 20, 2012.