



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

**Charter School Office
Quality Review Report**

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

**New York City Charter High School for Architecture,
Engineering and Construction Industry**

Charter School X395

**296 East 140th Street
Bronx
NY 10454**

Board Chair: Mr. Richard Izquierdo

Dates of review: May 19, 2009

**Lead Reviewer(s): Aamir Raza, Marsha Modeste, Reina
Utsunomiya, Fred Lisker**

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Jo Cheadle (Cambridge Education)

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The New York City Charter High School for Architecture, Engineering and Construction Industry (“AECI”) is a high school with 119 students from grade 9 through grade 11. The school population comprises 26% Black and 74% Hispanic students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 10% special education students. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 84%.

Overall Evaluation

The original vision for the work of this school was extremely feasible. The focus on excellence in academics linked to architecture, engineering and construction works is innovative and appealing to students. The concept of motivated learning with practical applications, leading to competencies that serve students in their future lives and careers is central to the school’s ambitions. In reality, the school has experienced a difficult first year and the vision for success is not yet firmly established. The Board has been forced to make crucial decisions to secure the viability of the school at very early stages. The Board must be applauded that these decisions were accurately taken and have resulted in stabilization and re-evaluation to set the school on the right track. The appointment of the new principal is the most significant of these decisions. As an experienced administrator, the principal has a clear understanding of the essential operational and organizational structures that must be in place for the school to function effectively. Moreover, he is a reflective and communicative leader, open to honest reflection about where changes must take place to ensure success. He is fully aware that the school needs carefully planned strategies to support these changes. He understands that these strategies must be supported by detailed action plans with agreed evaluation points and success criteria to measure progress. This level of strategic and action planning is however, not yet in place to support the school’s development and improvement.

There has been steady progress in the use of data over past months. Data analysis does not though include full attention to student subgroups, trends and patterns in outcomes. Leaders know that many teachers do not feel secure in their abilities to gather, organize, use and report data adequately. Not all teachers are able to carry out this aspect of their work competently, so there is no reliability that planning for the next stages in learning is accurate. As a result, student goal setting is not a regular practice and there can be no assurance that intervention strategies are always suitable or have the desired impact on student learning. Because there is limited attention to what data reveals, some aspects of the school’s work remain underdeveloped. For instance, even though there is slow progress made by higher achieving students, the school has not yet made the necessary changes to the curriculum to assure motivated learning. This is an essential focus area if the school is to secure high rates of attendance.

An unsettling year has taken its toll on staff morale and student attitudes. The new principal and school leaders have focused correctly on establishing a calm and supportive environment. There is open acknowledgement that some things are not yet in good order, but there is a growing commitment to doing what needs to be done to build solid foundations for the future. With the leadership of a determined principal and Board members who are not afraid to make hard choices, the school has capacity to realize its vision.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has begun to make meaningful use of data to drive whole school decision making and to guide instruction.
- The principal and many school stakeholders are working hard, and with increasing levels of success, to build a positive and productive school culture.
- The school is reflective of its practice and outcomes, and honest in its evaluation of the current position.
- The principal has a good understanding of what constitutes high quality learning and teaching, and clearly communicates his expectations for the school's development.
- The majority of students want to learn and have high aspirations for their futures.
- Many teachers are committed to ensuring that students achieve their goals and are successful in their life beyond school.
- The Board has taken the correct steps to ensure that the school is on the right track in its first year.

Areas of improvement

- Clearly establish the vision for the school's future for all stakeholders.
- Plan strategies for achieving the vision, including measurable goals at agreed interim checkpoints.
- Plan actions to support each strategy, showing clearly identified roles and responsibilities, and criteria to measure success.
- Support staff in the extended use of data to drive teaching, curriculum development and student goal setting.
- Extend the curriculum, including the use of technology, to enhance student learning.
- Raise levels of student attendance.

Part 3: Main Findings

How well the school meets Charter School Office's (CSO) evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is underdeveloped with proficient features.

Student data has been used in a meaningful way since January 2009. Leaders fully understand that delayed data analysis led to insufficient interventions, and that this has resulted in limited progress for too many students. They accurately account for disappointing progress for higher achieving students for example, as a result of assumptions made about students' abilities on entry to the school, without formal analysis of their actual test data. Since January, the school has made steady progress in establishing common practices for teachers to gather and use data in English language arts and math. Interim assessments are now in place and results are used to direct intervention and support for specific groups. There is an effort to increase teachers' use of formative and summative assessments in analyzing student progress. As a result, the school has evaluated that special education students have made notable gains. This is a good start, but leaders recognize that there remains much work to do to ensure that assessments are regularly and rigorously applied, and resulting data is carefully analyzed to guide planning for new learning in all subjects. Moreover, data is not yet used to formulate evaluative commentary across subjects, by grade levels or for individual teachers. Additionally, there is limited attention to the analysis of outcomes by student subgroups.

Leaders understand that parental access to student academic information is a necessary area for development. Unfortunately, while the school has made efforts to keep parents informed of their children's progress and achievement, there is inconsistent practice across the school. This aspect of the school's work will not be fully achieved until all teachers are confident and competent in gathering, analyzing, using and reporting academic information. Most teachers are at the beginning stages of skills and knowledge development in this respect. Leaders accept their responsibility to provide ongoing training to facilitate this vital element of the school's work.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is underdeveloped.

Although explicit goals for student learning are not yet a central part of teachers' collaborative work, analysis of data leading to focused intervention has supported the needs of special education students with pleasing outcomes. This signifies a starting point for making effective use of data to plan learning that meets the needs of all student subgroups. Leaders and many teachers understand their role in working together to set realistic, yet challenging goals to ensure that students make consistently good progress. The use of internal assessments to support interim goal setting is very new to the school

and has only recently taken place in English language arts and math. Teachers are not yet able to make informed judgments about what they need to do after conducting analysis of assessment information. In some cases, teachers are not fully committed to making the changes necessary to support students in the best way. Consequently, not all students receive the right intervention in a timely manner. The principal recognizes his accountability in ensuring that all staff members are 'on board', leading everyone to a complete understanding of why this work is a non-negotiable aspect of each teacher's role. Currently, students cannot be involved in self-assessment and goal setting, as systems are not consistently in place to enable this. Interestingly, in conversation with students, many know what they need to do next to make better progress, but there is not yet a school wide sense of urgency to formalize this process. In some cases, this accounts for unmotivated attitudes and lethargy within the student population that is not conducive to effective learning.

The involvement of parents has taken on a new edge since the appointment of the principal. There is now a more clearly defined role for parents in engaging with the school and in supporting learning at home. The principal speaks convincingly of plans for the future that capitalize on the sound start that he has made in involving parents more closely. There is now an active group of parents assisting the school in forging stronger links between home and school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The principal's previous leadership experiences serve him well in setting expectations for what effective teaching and learning should constitute. There is now a clear message of accountability, stemming from a more accurate understanding of student needs. There has been a high level of staff turnover during the year and this has been unsettling. The principal understands the need to build the school's culture and to develop productive professional relationships as the foundation for the future. In a reflective and supportive way, he is working to strengthen staff respect and trust, while communicating the non-negotiables that are essential for successful teaching and learning. Leaders are aware of where teaching needs improvement. Teachers are supported in planning, making use of recently analyzed data. There is still some way to go to ensure that all staff have the skills and knowledge necessary to address the full range of student needs. Planning to meet the needs of higher achieving students is one area where teachers require further guidance.

The school offers useful after school activities twice per week, providing extra help in English language arts and math. There are plans to offer stand-alone courses that support the themes of architecture, engineering and the construction industries. The absence of such courses is a disappointment for some students, as these themes were the inspiration for their choice of school. There are also plans to improve technology, although finances are limited. Additionally, despite the best efforts of specialist staff, facilities for physical education are not sufficient to provide students with the high school sporting experiences that they feel they should have. These curriculum issues are significant, particularly when considering that student attendance is lower than average.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is underdeveloped with proficient features.

Interim and current leaders have worked effectively to establish systems and routines that enable the school to function smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Well-organized basic operations have been crucial in maintaining stability under the pressure of challenges in the first year of operation. Teachers now have regular opportunities to plan together. With the growing use of assessment information and support, collaborative sessions are beginning to focus on supporting the specific needs of groups and individual students. Leaders understand that teachers need further training to do this with complete confidence and accuracy. Professional dialogue and walkthroughs guide leaders in making decisions about other training needs for teachers, but there are not yet embedded processes for regular observation of student learning to measure the impact of teaching and to guide decisions about professional development. Most teachers would welcome more feedback and this is a positive basis for making improvements. Leaders are keen to involve teachers in peer observations as teaching develops. They also recognize the benefits that teachers gain through visiting other schools. Leaders have made wise decisions to change teaching staff during the year to make sure that students have quality teachers and have taken appropriately steps to ensure the least disturbance to learning.

The school's theme evokes great potential for links with community and business partners. There has been little time to establish such links, but leaders recognize that, via external placements, intern experiences and work related projects, these could secure student motivation and enthusiasm for learning. The school aims to support students towards college readiness, but there are currently limited partnerships to ensure that this is achievable on academic, social and personal levels.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The newly appointed principal is a focused, reflective leader committed to improving the progress of students, fostering transparency and developing a positive school culture. There are identified priorities for the development of curriculum, instruction, assessment and the use of data. It is evident that these key areas guide daily discussions. Teachers have a growing understanding of the need to plan from the point of analysis of student data, by setting benchmarks for measuring progress towards achievement goals. The foundation for internal assessment procedures is in place, enabling teachers and leaders to monitor student progress regularly and accurately. Leaders know that similar plans must be in place for teacher development and that these plans must include specific goals for outcomes and measurable interim checkpoints.

It is not yet clear if all staff fully understand the vision that school leaders and the Board have for future success. Without an established vision and mission, reflecting the blueprint for the school from its establishment, it is hard to plan the work that will guide the school on a daily basis, or measure whether the school's work is successful. Leaders do not yet have a strategic overview of the how the school will meet its goals,

with systematic actions within a planned timeframe or measurable success criteria for tracking progress along the way. The principal completed a thorough and useful self-evaluation of the school prior to the Quality Review. This document sets the context for the development process, but evaluative findings are not yet set in a school development and improvement plan to share with all staff, families and students.

Quality Statement 6 - Monitor Effectiveness: The Charter School Board is proactive and diligent in monitoring its effectiveness and in undertaking its administrative responsibilities. The Board is responsible for the overall direction and fiscal well-being of the school and must adopt policies and by-laws that are necessary to meet its statutory responsibilities and produce optimal academic results.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Generally, the AECI board is providing adequate oversight to the school and is developing a performance matrix (similar to the one in effect at South Bronx Charter School for International Culture and the Arts) to evaluate the school leader at the end of the school year. The school faced a leadership change during the first half of the school year. The AECI board decided to change the school leadership due to poor implementation of the school's educational program by the former principal. According to the board, the school staff, mostly hired by the former principal, also faced close to 80% turnover rate. The school board provided wide latitude to the former principal during the planning and staffing phase. However, the departure of the former principal along with several staff has led the board to develop a formalized hiring process where the board is involved in interviewing and watching a demo lesson, where possible. The school board analyzed the problems facing the school, debated the issues as a board, formulated a course of action, and made the needed changes that were necessary to move the school's mission forward.

While difficult, it was a courageous decision on the AECI board's part. The board members demonstrated leadership and stepped up to their responsibilities as a collective governing body representing the interests of the families and students at their school. Since the former principal's departure, the school board conducted a wide search for a new school leader and appointed a new principal two-three weeks before the scheduled site visit. The effectiveness of the leadership change on student learning will be assessed during future site visits as the new school leader assumed his duties close to the visit conducted by the CSO. The new principal is getting support in classroom observations, operations, and curriculum planning from the school's partner organization, Victory Schools.

The board receives regular updates from the school leader and by requesting financial (YTD Expenses, Cash Flow, Budget, Variance Analysis) and other data driven (dashboard, internal assessments) information that relates to the educational programs offered by the school. The board also receives periodic reports at the board meetings by the school principal, academic committee, Victory Schools, and school board's personnel committee. The school's six member board represents academic (2), financial, construction, transportation, operations, and engineering expertise. The board experienced some turnover due to poor attendance at the board meetings. Additional board member recruitment remains high priority for the current school board. The board identified acquiring permanent space, integration into community, school and program recognition, leadership in construction industry, and ability to graduate its first class to college as its primary three year goals. The board remains focused on the school's

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facilities and financial needs and is working with financial institutions to secure funds for further development of the school facility. The budget preparation process is holistic and involves board members, administrators, teacher inputs, school business manager, and the school leader.

Quality Statement 7 - Maintain Financial Viability: The Charter School and its Board maintain financial viability and control over the course of the academic year. However, it is the ongoing financial information (cash flow, balance sheet, statement of activities, board approved budget), that determines the fiscal health of a school and keeps it solvent in the near future and beyond.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The AECI board in collaboration with Victory Schools, has contracted an audit firm to produce the school's financial statements. The school maintains necessary financial documents to facilitate decision making at all levels. The unaudited balance sheet as of April '09 casts a satisfactory financial position with liquid assets totaling \$296,668 and current liabilities of \$524,141, of which \$374,420 reflects unearned income. The school is facing minor cash flow problems but may be able to sustain its operations in the long-term. The statement of activities as of April '09 does not pose any particular concerns. The school provided the annual site visit team with a cash flow analysis projecting a negative balance of \$80,413 for fiscal year ending June '09 period. Please note that the schools' partner organization, Victory Schools, has assisted school in the past and may aid the school with its cash flow needs, where possible.

During the visit, officials from Victory Schools and school based staff were interviewed regarding the procurement process, check signing, randomly selected paid invoices, and fingerprinting documents were inspected. The school is following its adopted financial policies in collaboration with Victory Schools who is responsible for providing fiscal services support. The school has developed sound internal controls and an appropriate balance in segregation of duties among fiscal and operational staff. Paid invoices demonstrate that staff is following the process of purchase order approvals, ordering and receiving of goods, presence of packing slips and invoices along with proof of payment. The school has tagged its assets for inventory purposes.

Charter School Office Quality Criteria 2008-2009

NYC Charter High School for Architecture, Engineering and Construction Industries				
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty have...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?		X		
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?		X		
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?	X			
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?	X			
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school’s own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?		X		
1.6 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?		X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X		
Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?	X			
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Strategic Development Plan?	X			
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?		X		
2.4 involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?	X			
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/carers?		X		
2.6 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?		X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X		

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- 2 the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- 3 the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- 4 the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYQ, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data and hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge?		X		
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum to enhance learning both within and outside the school day and hold teachers for making instruction interesting and compelling?	X			
3.3 hold teachers accountable for creating a positive, safe and inclusive learning environment?			X	
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, classroom and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?		X		
3.5 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?			X	
3.6 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness and report actual attendance data?	X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X		
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?		X		
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?		X		
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?		X		
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?		X		
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising, other student support services and partnerships with outside entities around stated academic and personal development goals?		X		
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly, encourage effective learning and effectively address discipline-related incidents?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X		
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.				
<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X		
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?	X			
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?		X		
5.4 teachers and school leaders use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures to revise plans immediately and make strategic decisions to modify practices in order to reach stated goals?		X		
5.5 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?	X			
5.6 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?		X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X		

Quality Statement 6 – Monitor Effectiveness: The Charter School Board is proactive and diligent in monitoring its effectiveness and in undertaking its administrative responsibilities.							
<i>To what extent does the Board.....</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
6.1 ensure effective, broad outreach to create a student body that is representative of the school's Community School District?			X				
6.2 manage any conflict of interest within the governing body and throughout the school?			X				
6.3 hold EMOs, CMOs and school leadership accountable in their positions?			X				
6.4 ensure that teachers are provided with high quality professional development opportunities to further build on their professional expertise?			X				
6.5 respond to parent, staff and student concerns/complaints?			X				
6.6 provide ongoing training for board members so that they are able to fulfill the duties of their positions?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 6			X				
Quality Statement 7 – Maintain Financial Viability: The Charter School and its Board maintain financial viability and control over the course of the academic year.							
<i>To what extent do the school and its Board.....</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
7.1 ensure that an independent auditor is appointed to undertake an annual financial audit, which is submitted to the OCS along with any other relevant documentation?			X				
7.2 comply with the adoption of an annual budget for the upcoming school year, which is submitted to the OCS for review?			X				
7.3 maintain an accurate balance sheet, statement of activities, year-to-date expense report and statement of cash flow?			X				
7.4 implement procedures that provide adequate internal control measures to detect and prevent financial fraud, such as bank reconciliation, revenue recognition and travel reimbursement?			X				
7.5 align financial decision making to analysis and evaluation of student achievement data?			X				
7.6 focus budget decisions on the priorities for school development and improvement?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 7			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed

Charter School Compliance Checklist			
Does the Board and the school . . .	YES	NO	In process
1. have a documented policy for suspensions and expulsions?	X		
2. maintain up to date and compliant with IDEA Regulations for IEPs?	X		
3. send newsletters and other parent communications home in the predominant languages of the school community?	X		
4. implement a comprehensive special education program that complies with applicable governing laws?	X		
5. implement a comprehensive program for English Language Learners that complies with federal law?	X		
6. publish a schedule of regular board meetings that is easily accessible to the general public?	X		
7. ensure that accurate minutes from Board meetings are maintained and published?	X		
8. ensure that proposed contracts with EMOs and CMOs are submitted punctually to the OCS for review?	X		
9. maintain a functioning parent organization?	X		
10. ensure that parents are informed of the time and location of Board meetings that are open to the public?	X		
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