



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Williamsburg Middle School Academy

Middle School 050

**183 South 3 Street
Brooklyn
NY 11211**

Principal: Denise Jamison

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Reviewer: George Wallace

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Williamsburg Middle School Academy has 724 students in grades 6 through 8. The proportion of English language learners is 17% and 6% are special education students. The ethnic make-up of the school is 4% Black, 93% Hispanic, 2% Asian and 1% White. The school receives Title 1 funding. Attendance is 90.4% which is almost the same as for similar, but slightly below City schools.

Towards the end of the school year 2004-2005 Williamsburg Middle School Academy occupied all five floors of the existing building and had the school organized into three, almost self-contained, academies. This was reduced to two (Math and Science Academy and the Performance Arts Academy) when the Department of Education required the school to vacate the top floor so that a high school could be established in the building. The school is planning to open a third academy for grade 6 students only in September 2007.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has started to collect and use data about student performances to effect changes in approaches to planning for teaching.
- The school uses a wide range of academic intervention strategies to support learning of students in greatest need.
- Data analysis and use by some teachers is strong, especially those for special education students and English language learners.
- The academies provide beneficial arrangements for students.
- The hiring process for teachers is thorough and fair.
- The principal has the capacity to effect change.
- The school runs smoothly on a day to day basis.
- Teachers meet frequently, especially the English language arts and mathematics departments, to discuss curriculum development and new approaches to teaching specific topics.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that data collection throughout the school is consistent so that teachers increase their knowledge and understanding of the value of data use and of students' academic learning needs.
- Improve the school planning process so that an annual action plan is produced, showing the school goals and linking them with subject improvement and with professional development.
- Streamline the professional development program so that teachers know well in advance what the program is and how it links to the overall school improvement priorities.
- Improve professional interaction amongst the administration, the teachers and the students.
- Provide more opportunities for teachers to meet together to analyze data and plan learning to accelerate student progress.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school with proficient features.

The principal has introduced several positive features that are beginning to communicate her aspirations for school improvement. Nevertheless, standards of student achievement are low and have been falling over recent years. Increased use of data analysis in the past year has allowed staff to begin to see the value of using data for planning, and therefore, more closely matching students' work to their needs. In only a few cases is this sufficiently developed to be regarded as working well. It is, however, a tool that is recognized by the principal as being central to staff development and school improvement.

Planning overall is undeveloped and there is no clear link communicated to staff showing what professional development is necessary in order to reach the annual school goals. The school plan is not a working document and therefore there are no interim evaluations to determine whether the school is on track to achieve its goals.

Although the influence of the Teachers' College on the structure of lessons is having a positive impact on lesson planning, too few staff know what the overall priorities for school development are. Teachers very largely know they are accountable for the effectiveness of students' learning. Teachers know their students well and as such are able to recommend individuals for additional academic support when required. The school provides a wide range of additional support, although the after school program is not well attended. Specific support for special education students and English language learners is good. The academy arrangements are beneficial to the school in that they reduce movement between floors, and importantly they provide an element of student choice in their studies. Parent participation is low, but those who are active indicate that they receive plenty of information. The school runs smoothly, although it is evident that the senior staff and teachers are not as visible in the hallways at lesson change-over times as often as one might expect. This year, the principal has improved lines of communication with staff by adding a weekly newsletter and a twice per semester information document. The content is helpful and often requests information or stresses potential professional development issues. However, it is too new to show its impact in classrooms and on standards. The quality of self-evaluation amongst staff is not strong because it is based more on feelings than on any analysis of data.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school collects a wide range of data, some self-generated. Most of the data that is updated periodically is produced through teachers' assessments. This data, together with Princeton Review test results, are usefully used in subject team meetings to identify

student work that has been poorly understood. However, data is not used to ascertain what and which strategies have been used to effect successful learning and so inform future planning needs. Grade level data is used in English language arts and mathematics subject meetings, but rarely for other subjects. There is some very good use of data by individual teachers of special education students and English language learners. The outcomes are used to track the effectiveness of learning and what strategies need to be modified or new ones used to raise students' achievements. There is no analysis of student achievement by ethnicity. However, the school has, since last September, successfully introduced a pilot program for single sex classes. There has as yet been no formal evaluation of this because the initiative is too new.

Performance data for other schools are compared with those of the Williamsburg Middle School Academy, as is data showing past performance. The data compared is mainly English language arts and mathematics as well as overall school results. Data use is in its infancy, and therefore, for example, while teachers are able to offer projections of the outcomes of the New York State tests in the weeks before they take these tests, such information is not sought. As a result, few staff use their data in a comprehensive way to look for patterns, identify students in need of specific targeting or to allow the data to prompt teachers to ask questions. However, across the school there is a great deal of statistical information that could be used more effectively, both to track students' achievements through the school year, and to periodically evaluate their progress and ascertain whether progress has been high enough.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

The school Comprehensive Education Plan has three very important development goals. The goals are demanding, but not stated in a way that would allow for easy measurement. Although the school is in its infancy regarding data analysis, it has made some strides to raise the profile of such use among staff. However, as yet there is no consistent and comprehensive understanding of the way data can be used to inform planning and teaching or make evaluative comments about the quality of the school. Goals and plans do focus on the school, but they are not followed through effectively. The main school plan is not a working document for the administration or for sub-sections of the plan to be used by staff. In addition many aspects of the plan do not relate strongly enough to the core school goals. Teachers track students' achievements, and as such they frequently identify and refer individual students to the academic intervention team for discussion and action. Nearly all students referred receive some support by the intervention team, and the school recognizes the need to continue working to decrease the number of students at Level I. Other students in need, such as those with individual education plans or English language learners receive good quality support that ensures good progress.

Students and parents are well informed about student progress, but while there are a few committed parents, the school finds that despite all its efforts it is very difficult to involve parents in activities, including providing useful information about their children. Students rarely set goals, and most fail to complete their homework on time. Expectations by staff, in too many cases, are insufficiently high and therefore the drive for performance improvement is low. The core school goals drive the principal's thinking about school

development, but overall, the goals and the plans and strategies to secure them are insufficiently known by staff.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school follows the mandated curriculum and more. Since the school was divided into two academies, each has its own form of curriculum enrichment. One has a performing arts emphasis and therefore all students here experience aspects of chorus, dance and drama, and learn to play a musical instrument. The other academy has a bias towards mathematics and science. However, bar extra instruction in computer studies, the curriculum enrichment in this academy is not strong. In both academies students experience additional after school activities and have the opportunities to attend trips, both as rewards and to enhance their learning. The mathematics/science academy after school robotics club came first in their region in an inter school city-wide competition. The curriculum generates meaningful data, but the quality of overall analysis is weak. Teachers very largely recognize that they are accountable for the effectiveness of students’ learning, and therefore plan accordingly. However, with specific exceptions, there is little use of data collection and analysis to refine and heighten their understanding of students’ learning needs.

The areas of special creative use have been in employing additional staff to meet student needs, for example, academic advisers for each academy, additional teachers for English language learners and a mathematics coach. Other staffing decisions are based on curricular needs. Basic scheduling decisions are a product of the academy structure. In other situations, especially with regard to the use of intervention strategies, data and the school budget is used in a traditional way to ensure that the student needs can be met.

Teaching satisfactorily engages students, but this is not the case across the whole school. Students feel that most teachers know and respect students as learners, and therefore respond to their needs. Importantly, students feel that there are adults in the school who they can turn to if they have concerns. Teachers do not know students’ academic needs so well. The school has satisfactory procedures to monitor and tackle student absence. High rates of absence do trigger immediate intervention, including home visits.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The selection and hiring procedures for the school are thorough and fair. Staff selection is based on teachers’ expectations of student performance as well as demonstrating their competence as class teachers rather than on their understanding of the value of data use. Over the past two years the in-school professional development program has experienced administrative challenges and, as such, has not been sufficiently effective. At the same time several staff have attended local and national courses outside school, and provided feedback on their return. Therefore, the overall impact of professional development in

securing improvements measured against the whole school goals has not been effective. There is no link between planned professional development and the school improvement plan. This is because there is no specific action plan showing how the school's goals may be reached. As a result of this, it is difficult for the school to evaluate progress towards its goals. There is recognition that much more needs to be done in raising the expectations of everyone around the school and in part using a strong cross school understanding of data analysis and its use as a catalyst for improvement. The present mid-year position shows there is a very long way to go.

The frequency of principal and assistant principal observations of lessons is satisfactory. Feedback is given, and written records show that for the most part it is suitably evaluative. It is rare for teachers to observe each other, although some teachers have recently had the opportunity to visit lessons in other nearby schools. This opportunity is valuable in making comparisons in the way similar students are taught and gaining an insight into expectations and work ethic of other students. Planning for new units of work occur in teams, as does the recently introduced evaluation of test scores. However, there is no overall strategy to link the findings to either a subject plan or the aims of the whole school improvement plan. The principal is respected and has the capacity to make improvements. The school runs smoothly and procedures are clear from the time staff are hired. Although the amount of youth development and support service involvement with the school is low, that which exists is aligned to the academic goals of the school.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

There are no active school plans that have been communicated to all staff and/or periodically used to check progress towards achieving school goals. Some departments, especially for English language learners and special education, frequently use diagnostic assessments to aid their understanding of student progress. The outcome of this data allows teachers to ask questions about achievement and progress of students. For example, why did the results of one student collapse while in most other cases there was good improvement? In this case the answer was simple in that the student had been away for most of the time between the three tests. However, there is much more that the data is able to reveal, but the school has not started to immerse teachers in a process of understanding how to use the school data they receive as well as generate it themselves. In other cases there is emerging evidence of staff using interim information to revise their teaching so that areas not well understood can be revisited in different ways.

There is little information arising from data analysis and, with no action plan in place, there are no opportunities for the school to objectively assess its work in progress towards achieving the three main school goals. However, the principal does generate some strategies to aid staff development, while looking forward to the next school year. The principal provides staff with useful newsletter commentary about achievements and goals. These do not yet emanate from any structured plan, but rather from an immediate identification that something needs to be done. Because there are no active plans these cannot drive successive phases of goal setting towards school improvement. The current program is more ad hoc and responsive to identified needs on a week-to-week basis and not on a carefully thought through process of long-term school improvement.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Williamsburg Middle School Academy (MS 050)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score	X		

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school* 	X		
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.	X		
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.	X		
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.	X		
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2	X		

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.	X		
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.	X		
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.	X		
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.		X	
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.	X		
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.	X		
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5	X		