



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

William Alexander School

Middle School 51

**350 5th Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11215**

Principal: Lenore Berner

Dates of review: April 18 – 20, 2007

Reviewer: Joan L. Johnston

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The William Alexander Middle School is located in the Park Slope area of Brooklyn and services 996 students in grades 6 through 8. Recent statistics for the school indicate that 37% of the students are White, 33% Hispanic, 17% Black, along with 13% Asian and other ethnicities. Approximately 10% are special education students and just under 2% of the students are English language learners. The school does not receive Title 1 funding.

Student attendance, at 95.3%, is slightly higher than that of similar schools and above the 91.6% average at City schools. Student stability, at 98%, is above that that of both similar and City schools with few students leaving before moving up to high school. Middle School 51 is designated as a gifted and talented school where all students participate in an intensive arts program for their three years at the school.

The principal was appointed to her position in August 2006.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has moved into her new role very effectively and has begun to energize the school around goals that will take the school to the next level.
- High expectations are conveyed to students by teachers, parents, and the administration.
- The talent-based arts program, a three-year requirement for all students, draws out the best in these young adolescent learners.
- Professional development programs have been effectively focused to emphasize the workshop model and differentiate instruction to meet individual student needs.
- Students trust and respect their teachers.
- Student attendance issues, such as absence and lateness, are addressed quickly before problems become serious.
- Parental support and involvement is on-going and valued.
- Youth development and student support services are coordinated to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of students.

What the school needs to improve

- Review the academic program and related academic intervention services for consistency across all classrooms at each grade level and within departments.
- Provide focused training to all faculty members in more effective uses of data to improve instruction and student achievement.
- Continue to address the effectiveness of the special education program.
- Use the scheduling and budgeting process to offer solutions that will mitigate the impact that large class size has on supervising student attentiveness and monitoring individual student progress.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The William Alexander School a highly-regarded middle school with a required arts program that attracts students to the school and brings out the best in them over their three year stay. An extensive after school enrichment program offers academic, leadership, talent, and recreational programs to all students.

A new principal is energizing the school around important goals that focus on improving teaching and learning. The school is poised to make significant progress in raising achievement levels for all students over the next few years. Academic support services are targeted to meet the needs of under-performing students. Professional development opportunities have recently expanded. Youth development services are comprehensive and responsive to the social and emotional needs of this age group.

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 and proficiently uses data from a variety of sources. State assessments, City-wide interim assessments in English language arts and mathematics, and classroom-generated reports are carefully reviewed to understand the performance and progress of students. Literacy and mathematics coaches work with teachers by grade level to support individual students who are either performing below expectations or below State standards.

The school has established a better picture of the performance of specific students by their ethnicity, special education status, or as English language learners. The administration has initiated a targeted plan to consistently review performance of students in these categories. The new City data system is expected to facilitate this process in the future.

The principal has developed a comprehensive plan to assist struggling learners meet required standards on State and interim assessments and to monitor their progress. In addition to academic assessment data, the school proficiently monitors attendance data and patterns of late arrival to school. Components of the new plan include professional development for teachers and additional resources and intervention programs for students.

In her first year as the building leader, the principal has already begun to collect information on the performance of similar schools and to familiarize herself with the trend data on the past performance of students at the school. The assistant principals are also involved in this process.

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 proficient.

The school effectively uses data to plan and set goals. Annually the school leadership team develops the Comprehensive Education Plan using performance data and school indicators to establish annual improvement goals. When the new principal arrived in August, she reviewed this plan and developed three top priority goals for the current school year. These goals, which focus on the school as a whole, each classroom, specific subjects such as science, and groups of students such as special education students and English language learners, are now in the implementation stage.

For example, a new academic intervention services plan, focused on the needs of students falling below standards in English language arts and mathematics, was introduced in September. The plan includes objectives which outline specific skills and strategies to assist struggling students. An individual plan for each identified student is in the development stage and will include a timeline for assessing progress. In addition, the names of student failures by classroom subject area and across each grade level are reviewed with a guidance counselor after each report card. A progress form is maintained that charts results for each student.

High expectations are a norm at the school which has an admission standard. Parents and students are well aware of these expectations. The curriculum is rigorous and is linked in many ways to the required arts program. There are many student performances throughout the year and all students are involved. These performances showcase student talent and celebrate the achievement of middle school students. Parents are active volunteers with the arts program and involved in goal setting for the school. The school works hard to include parents and provides timely information to parents through newsletters and email. The parent coordinator effectively coordinates the after school tutoring program, the school website, and troubleshoots parental concerns and requests.

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 has a well-developed talent-based arts program that is aligned with the regular academic program. The arts program is both rigorous and academic. The arts program actively motivates students and provides a positive outlet for emerging talents and youthful energy.

Instruction in the English language arts program is undergoing a review. The school has re-introduced staff development from Columbia University's Teachers College Reading and Writing Program. Teachers have established a curriculum calendar for reading and writing at each grade level. They use an appropriate combination of standardized assessment scores, individual and group conferencing, reading and writing portfolios and other means to gain a comprehensive understanding of individual student progress. In mathematics, the school has an eclectic curriculum that pulls together required elements of the City curriculum with supplemental instruction. Curriculum maps and pacing calendars are well developed. English language arts and mathematics coaches take a lead role in helping teachers plan instruction based on student needs.

As the school has shifted to a greater focus on students who are not meeting the standards, a greater emphasis has been placed this year on differentiating instruction to meet student needs and providing the professional development that will support teachers in achieving this goal. Teachers recognize they are accountable for student learning, but are in the early stages of effectively using data to realign instruction at the classroom level. However, large class sizes mitigate against close supervision of student attentiveness and monitoring of individual student progress. The principal visits classrooms regularly, is involved in progress monitoring, and provides focused feedback to staff.

The principal is looking forward to the upcoming budgeting, staffing, and scheduling process to make decisions based on the plans they have developed and the needs revealed by student data. Already new materials are in classrooms to support leveled books clubs and lesson labs in science. Professional development has been increased and the needs of specific classes, such as the collaborative team teaching classrooms, are being reviewed. These signs all point to progress and growth for the school.

Programs actively engage most students. Hands on learning experiences are apparent in most classrooms. The school has numerous partnerships that expand opportunities for learning such as with the American Museum of Natural History. Through that institution, the Hayden Planetarium brings their 'Discovering the Universe' unit to eighth grade science classes. An expansive after school enrichment program broadens learning and supports student academic goals. Technology integration is in the developmental stage and is not yet consistent across all classrooms.

There is an established pattern of caring and support for students by the adults in the school. An extensive array of guidance initiatives provides both academic and social/emotional support for students. Guidance counselors and assistant principals loop with their students each year to assure a sustained presence for students throughout their three years at the school. Students understand that staff are there to help them and trust and respect their teachers. Student attendance issues, such as absence and lateness, are addressed quickly before problems become serious

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 well developed.

The principal has made a good entry to the school and has gained the support of faculty, administrators, parents and students. The principal has held one-on-one conversations with each faculty member to assess their goals and needs. The school community values collaborative team players. As the principal begins to hire staff, she plans to look for teachers who are lifelong learners and comfortable with open classrooms engaging students in a workshop approach to learning.

Professional development is a vital part of the improvement process at the school. The administrative staff observes classrooms and listens to the needs of faculty. Surveys are also taken to determine choices. Attention is paid to student performance data. Professional development in English language arts is now embedded within the classroom day. Additional training, aligned with the standards and schools goals, is offered for teachers by the region. Resources are provided to support change and enhance the classroom environment. There are also weekly planning meeting with teachers and coaches in the areas of English language arts and mathematics.

The principal and her assistants use structured walkthroughs to observe classroom instruction and to provide feedback for improvement efforts. The principal has established a faculty study group examining best practices. The discussions focus on essential questions and ultimate goals for the middle school. Teachers are actively involved in studying the best ways to reach their improvement goals.

The principal clearly has the capacity to effect change and has developed the relationships and goals that will lead to improved performance. The school runs smoothly and student safety issues are dealt with promptly. Class size is larger than parents and teachers would like. Hallways and stairs are crowded during passing periods and dismissal. At these times, all faculty and staff members must participate in supervision.

There are a significant number of effective programs and resources to support youth development. Students and families benefit from a full time social worker and additional nursing staff funded through the Department of Health in collaboration with Long Island College Hospital. There is a strong effort to support eighth grade students through the application and articulation process for high school. The school has developed many useful partnerships with the community, cultural institutions, and service organizations. A well-regarded annual seminar on conflict resolution brings in international and national experts and expands the horizons of students.

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 proficient.

The school has recently introduced more effective structures for monitoring progress. For example, when few students were reporting for mandated before school tutoring, a more effective program was developed that requires greater parental contact. Progress charts are in place to objectively measure individual student progress on a regular basis. When an analysis of State assessment data in the fall indicated that the results for special education students were below those of similar schools, a comprehensive plan was developed to improve instruction and resources. This plan is still in the implementation stages and at present there is no evaluation to assure progress across all identified classrooms. There are, however, indicators that special education students are better supported and monitored.

As teachers are becoming proficient in analyzing and disaggregating data, they are beginning to focus more on evaluating the progress of individual students. There is not yet a consistent approach to this across all classrooms. One current effective strategy is to look at individual student work to identify student errors and then develop model lessons that will improve skills. For example, as interim data revealed that the reading skills of some students were very weak, the school introduced a program tailored to the developmental reading skills needed by these students.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: William Alexander School (MS 51)	∅	✓	+
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	