



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Dr. Gladstone H. Atwell Middle School 61 Star  
Academy**

**Middle School 61**

**400 Empire Boulevard  
Brooklyn  
NY 11225**

**Principal: Rhonda Taylor**

**Dates of review: September 25 – 27, 2006**

**Reviewer: Clive Parsons**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Dr. Gladstone H. Atwell Middle School 61 Star Academy comprises three smaller learning communities, each covering grades 6 through 8 and specializing in distinctive aspects of the curriculum. There are over 1000 students across grades 6 to 8. There is a high proportion of both English language learners and special education students. Most students are Black, with recent immigrants, mainly from the Caribbean, at about the same level as schools across the City. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding. The school is placed in the high needs group for similar schools and a high proportion of students enter at performance level 1.

Attendance is close to the average across the City and above that in similar schools. The number of student suspensions is much lower than schools of a similar size. The student population is more stable than both similar schools and schools across the City.

Teachers are more experienced than in other schools and tend to have been at the school for longer. Teacher absence is half that of other schools.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal provides strong and visionary leadership, with the whole school community supporting her high expectations and commitment to all students.
- There has been an increase in students who have moved from level 1 to higher levels of proficiency in both English language arts and mathematics over the last few years.
- Results in state tests at grade 8 are above those in similar schools.
- Staff work very effectively together to improve their practice and that of their colleagues: there is some very high quality professional development.
- Students feel safe, secure and well supported, appreciate the openness of the staff and the opportunities provided to raise issues and discuss concerns.
- Students welcome the enrichment opportunities made available to them and support these well.
- The school is successful in enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning: they engage well in the activities provided and often excel at evaluating their own learning and that of their peers.
- High quality collaborative learning is a strong feature of the school, both for students and the staff.
- Some instruction is of a very high quality and much is well developed.

### What the school needs to improve

- Improve the effectiveness of the use by some classroom teachers of student performance data in order to differentiate instruction more consistently.
- Provide sustained high quality professional development to ensure that a small number of teachers improve their instructional practice.
- Continue to develop the curriculum to increase opportunities to reinforce and apply key skills across different subjects.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

**This is a well developed school, with significant strengths.**

It has a very high capacity to sustain the improvements made over the last few years and some aspects of its work are exemplary. It is not consistently well developed across all aspects however, and there remain some inconsistencies in practice that need to be tackled.

The principal is passionate about the academic and personal development of every student at the school and this commitment and determination is shared by staff, students and parents. She has been very largely successful in developing a learning community that encompasses staff and parents as well as the students. The same philosophy of learner-centered education is applied equally to its students, the professional development of staff, and to supporting the understanding and involvement of parents. Classes are characterized by high levels of engagement and self-evaluation by students. Collaborative learning is a very strong feature of the school. This enables both staff and students to feel safe to try things out, to explore ideas and to welcome critique from peers. The school is increasingly using a variety of data sources to target improvement and to evaluate the effectiveness of its actions. This is helping teachers to personalize the learning process and to provide differentiated challenge and support for students.

The proportion of students meeting the required standard in grade 8 state tests is above that in similar schools and the proportion of students far below the standard is less. To raise standards further still, the biggest challenge ahead is to bring greater consistency to instruction so that the most effective practice becomes even more widespread.

### 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 well developed.**

The school collects and analyses a wide variety of data to monitor and evaluate students' progress. Many students have low performance levels on entry and the school pays particular attention to measuring and assuring the progress of this group, demonstrated by the significant fall in level 1 students as they progress through the grades.

There is a good understanding of the role of short-term and classroom-based assessment to support the learning process, as well as periodic and summative assessment to monitor the security of that learning. There is also a good understanding of the need to target interventions early enough to have most impact. The school is particularly sensitive to wider information about students that may have an adverse impact on their academic progress. The school knows its students well, academically and personally, both as individuals and as groups and uses this knowledge to maximize their achievement.

Reviewing students' work and collaborative planning are significant parts of much professional development for staff. This supports a consistent application of assessment criteria and consequently a more reliable outcome. Students are also encouraged to evaluate their own performance, as well as that of their peers, and opportunities to do this are common in classrooms. Some very perceptive and analytical evaluation discussions between students are to be heard. Grade and level descriptions are constantly referred to in class and are an integral part of the language of learning.

Performance data is examined in detail to provide strengths and weaknesses for individual students and to align instruction accordingly. Overall data is used well to establish curricular targets to improve provision. Data for groups within the school, including class groups, English language learners and special education students is evaluated for comparative performance. This analysis is then used effectively to improve instruction. Comparisons are also made with other schools to enable evaluation of relative performance and to support judgments about the school's overall effectiveness.

**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 well developed.**

The school's culture is student-centered, with a successful transition having been made from an instruction focus to a learning focus. High expectations are a hallmark of the school. They are conveyed to students and their parents at every opportunity and modeled for them by staff. A variety of activities is provided for parents to enable them to understand the vision and work of the school and for them to become more involved and effective in supporting their child's learning. A web site has been developed where parents and students can check on the homework set, for example. Many activities are workshop-based to make learning for parents engaging and effective. The school is a welcoming place for parents and they appreciate the principal's open door policy.

Plans and goals are based around students' learning and progress. Most teachers routinely evaluate what students know and understand and what is needed to take this to the next level. Students are themselves involved in this process through self- and peer-review. In turn, this supports students in taking greater responsibility for their own learning. The school has identified that some teachers need to be more effective at setting goals and devising strategies to achieve them. Analysis of test data is used well to determine gaps in individual students' knowledge. This process is also used well to identify any broader weaknesses across groups or grades and to establish curriculum targets to eliminate them. In this way both planning and instruction are aligned to students' needs.

Given the wide ranging and complex needs exhibited by many students, effective targeting of academic and personal support is essential. Well managed partnerships with the many additional providers and agencies then ensures that interventions have maximum impact. Staff are sensitive to changes and patterns exhibited by students and trigger interventions, wherever possible, before academic progress is lessened.

Most students make good progress. Although the school did not make adequate yearly progress in English language arts and math for special education students, it can

demonstrate appropriate progress for these students. Combined general and special education classes help to maintain high expectations and appropriate challenge. The school also provides programs that assist students in achieving Regents credits in a range of subjects and in preparation for other external tests. Students also welcome the range of enrichment activities made available to them.

**Quality Statement 3 – Build and Align Capacity: 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 well developed.**

Instructional programs require students to be active participants in learning and much teaching is of good quality; some is of a high standard. Collaborative working, in pairs and groups, is a feature of most classes and students respond positively and enjoy these interactions. Some student discussion is of an exceptionally high quality and contributes significantly to their learning. Students feel safe to try out ideas and solutions so that they are able to respond to challenges without fear of ‘being wrong’. The occasional classroom where these strategies are not yet happening consistently stands apart from others. The school has recognized that a small number of teachers require sustained professional development in order to implement these ideas more consistently.

Students’ attitudes to learning and their behavior are very good and attendance is close to the City average and above that in similar schools. Student attendance is monitored carefully and used to trigger further explorations. Appropriate responsibility is placed on teachers to monitor and follow up such issues directly with parents. Students are very appreciative of the openness and approachability of the staff; they are able to identify a staff member with whom they would discuss issues of concern. They also confirm that the principal’s open door policy works in practice.

Staff consider themselves accountable to students and their parents, and to themselves and their peers. There is evidence of increasingly effective use of data to differentiate instruction, to group pupils and to target interventions. Nevertheless, the school has correctly identified further improvements and greater consistency in this area as likely to have most impact on raising standards further still.

Knowledge and data about students and their performance drives key decisions about the budget and resources, including staff. The school ensures that curriculum requirements are met and that students are prepared for tests. It is also very concerned to provide opportunities for the development of broader skills and interests and offers enrichment and extension activities to interest and motivate students. The school is now at the stage where it is seeking to ensure that curriculum experiences in different subjects reinforce each other more effectively. The opportunities provided to apply key skills and understanding from one subject to another will help to make learning more interesting and more secure.

**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 school is very concerned to ensure that all staff understand and share the vision and expectations that drive its work, as well as being effective in their role. New staff are very carefully selected. Exceptionally high quality professional development nurtures and builds their instructional and leadership capacity. The same principles that drive students' learning drive professional development for staff, so that it is research based, reflective and collaborative. Staff feel safe to test out ideas and discuss openly the strategies that have worked well and those that have been less successful. Visiting other's classrooms and modeling activities for others demonstrate the trust that has been developed within the instructional team. Staff give freely of their time and enjoy these collaborative activities. The school as a whole is truly developing as an effective learning community.

The principal is exceptionally well regarded by the whole school community. Parents trust that she will ensure that their child receives the best possible instruction and guidance. Leadership is effectively dispersed, with students increasingly responsible for their own learning and staff taking responsibility for their professional development. Wide-ranging partnerships support the school in maximizing students' progress. The school operates effectively on a day-to-day basis.

Formal and informal monitoring and evaluation provide evidence of the effective implementation of strategies and developments. Staff are self-evaluating and regularly reflect upon the impact of their work. Senior staff and those leading developments observe instructional practice and provide feedback to teachers. There is a secure and shared understanding of the principles that underpin learning which leads to consistent evaluation.

**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 well developed.**

As a learning community, the school is naturally reflective and evaluative. It gathers wide-ranging data and other information about the impact and effectiveness of its work. It has established a number of groups and committees who monitor and evaluate its practice well. Students have an appropriate voice. Work with the school's partners also requires it to evaluate its effectiveness on a regular basis. The school is empowering of students and staff who recognize that they are accountable to themselves and to each other. There is a culture of research and evidence-based development. As a result, the school knows itself well and has clear well-thought out strategies for improvement.

The school is focused upon making progress towards its goals and is sufficiently sensitive to the impact of its actions to be able to judge ongoing performance. Interim evaluations and assessments are then used to modify and refocus actions and strategies so that the school is increasingly outcome driven. Staff then use these and work hard to achieve the best possible outcomes for students.

The Comprehensive Educational Plan is all inclusive and is continually revised and updated. Nevertheless, the school has recognized the potential to develop this further still, to become a more usable tool in driving improvement.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Dr. Gladstone H. Atwell Middle School 61 Star Academy (MS 61)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>			<b>X</b>
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>

\* 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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>	<b>Ø</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			<b>X</b>
<b>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.</b>	<b>Ø</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			<b>X</b>
<b>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.</b>	<b>Ø</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			<b>X</b>

