



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Cypress Hills Community School**

**Public School / Middle School 089**

**350 Linwood Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11208**

**Principal: Irene Leon**

**Dates of review: February 8 – 9, 2007**

**Reviewer: Roy Storrs**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Cypress Hills Community School was founded by parents and community leaders in 1997 as a bilingual school. It offers a dual language curriculum in which English dominant and Spanish dominant children jointly attend classes in English and Spanish, resulting in fluency in both languages. It is sponsored by the New York City Board of Education in partnership with Community Schools District 19, New Visions for Public School and the Cypress Hills local Development Corporation. In 2006 the school was granted Empowerment School status. Empowerment Schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment Schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements. This school is currently engaged in designing its own periodic assessment materials as part of the Empowerment Zone initiative.

The school has 240 students from kindergarten to grade 8. The student population comprises 80% Hispanic students, 18% Black students, 2% Asian students and 0.4% White students. Ten percent of the school population is special education students. At 93%, attendance is slightly higher than the average for similar and City schools. The school has Title 1 funding with 82% of students qualifying.

The school operates in space borrowed from a middle school which occupies the rest of the building. The school suffers from constant disruption from the host middle school's announcement system.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The committed principal and co-director share their vision for the school, form an effective partnership and enjoy the respect of the community.
- The two enthusiastic and knowledgeable coaches are exemplary models and provide invaluable support across the school.
- The relatively inexperienced, hard-working faculty work well together and support one another.
- Students benefit considerably from the bilingual approach to teaching and learning.
- The school is determinedly embedding on-going assessment and the use of data to set goals and target instruction.
- The school is beginning to integrate subject instruction to make the curriculum more meaningful to the students.
- The curriculum is enriched further by the artist in residence program.
- The school has an extensive, professional development program focused on achieving the school's goals.
- The impressive involvement of parent and community representatives in the life of the school is a great strength.
- The school runs efficiently on a day-to-day basis in spite of the considerable constraints of the shared accommodation.

### What the school needs to improve

- Provide further professional development to increase the faculty's capacity to use data effectively in planning and setting goals.
- Extend the good use of assessment data in literacy to other subjects.
- Continue to develop differentiated instruction to meet the needs of individual students.
- Ensure that students are interested and engaged in all lessons.
- Consolidate monitoring procedures and involve a wider range of personnel in monitoring and revising the school's plans.
- Consider appointing an assistant principal with middle school experience, so that the principal can delegate some of her heavy administrative responsibilities.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

Cypress Hills Community School is successful in meeting its main goal of making its students near fluent in English and Spanish. It achieves this by its dual language approach to instruction whereby the main language of instruction alternates from week to week. The school's founding co-director and the committed principal who was a teacher at the school when it opened in 1997 work well together and are well-respected by the community. The school's focus has attracted staff committed to a dual language setting and keen to work together for the benefit of the students. Since becoming an Empowerment School, assessment and use of data to set goals are becoming firmly embedded in literacy. This is being extended to other subjects starting with mathematics. An extensive and well-planned professional development program is designed to support teachers in achieving the school's aims. In-school professional development provided by the two skilled coaches is especially effective. Beyond the strong bilingual focus, the school teaches the mandated curriculum and offers students a breadth of other experiences. Teachers are beginning to link subject instruction, supported by a variety of artists in residence. Parental and community support benefits the students considerably and is a great strength of the school.

### 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 with well developed features.**

Since becoming an empowerment school in 2006, the school has placed considerable emphasis upon assessment and data gathering. Whilst it uses standardized data, its own internal assessment systems are proving much more effective in tracking the attainment and progress of each student, class and grade in literacy. Inevitably the particular interest within the school is the students' progress in English and Spanish for which provision is excellent. To support this focus the school makes effective use of advice and assessment instruments from several professional and academic associations. A detailed assessment calendar charts diagnostic testing in literacy for the year ahead and each teacher keeps an on-going assessment file to record data for their class. Assessment results provide an invaluable running record for each student and help in grouping students and planning future work. A commendable initiative is students beginning to be involved in assessing their own work, although this is at an early stage. Students' self-assessments are contained in individual portfolios which are being developed as a valuable means of formative assessment. Each student has a well-maintained personal portfolio in which work samples, mainly writing in English and Spanish, and students' own self-reflections are kept. This cumulative record follows the student through the grades and informs parents how well their children are progressing. Much data is kept and used effectively for special needs students and students who arrive speaking only Spanish.

Princeton review data is used to determine mathematics instructional groups. The school is aware that the rigorous diagnostic testing in literacy needs to be extended to mathematics and other subjects. Due to its particular dual language status, comparison with other schools is problematic. The principal and coaches follow the school's own performance by student, class and grade using data analysis and studying portfolios as a result of which a formal review system is emerging.

**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 with well-developed features.**

Using data to set goals is a rapidly developing area. With the school's dual language focus, using data to plan and set goals is being embedded, especially in literacy, where students are being assessed in their native and second language in their reading and writing abilities. Data collected regarding students' attainment and progress in English and Spanish identifies whole class trends, enabling teachers to group students by attainment, to plan work to suit each group and to target instruction. Teachers take advantage of joint preparation periods and half-day retreats to plan collaboratively within grade teams and set appropriate goals. Teachers use curriculum mapping software to document their study units based on identified needs.

A Pupil Personnel Team has been established to scrutinize data of students identified as struggling academically. The Network's Academic Intervention Manager has laid a firm foundation for this cohesive team's work by giving useful procedural advice.

Through the empowerment school's Initiative, the students identified as being most in need of improvement are the English language learners in the middle school grades because there is only one class in each grade, teachers are relatively inexperienced, and administration or faculty has little middle school expertise. Within the middle school grades one third of students are English language learners, in addition to which they are approaching adolescence. Consequently, the school looks at their literacy data and social and emotional development to address their individual and collective needs. Much of the school's work is undertaken collaboratively, but the good use of data to plan and set goals in literacy has not yet been extended to other subjects.

The parent teacher collaborative is a well-led organization with a core of very active and supportive parents. In collaboration with the parent coordinator they keep parents fully informed of developments in school through newsletters, regular informative workshops, telephone conversations and home visits. Parents praise the school for its very high expectations and its open-door policy. They appreciate the report cards and consultation evenings through which they learn of their children's progress, are told of their goals and given guidance on how to help their learning at home.

**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.**

Students benefit considerably from the dual language approach to teaching and learning in which most lessons are conducted in English and Spanish on alternative weeks. The emphasis upon literacy is reflected in classroom displays and in the way it is developed through other subjects. Teachers have developed integrated units around a theme, in some cases enhanced by the involvement of artists in residence to make the curriculum more meaningful for the students. For instance a study of Asia promoted reading and writing skills and involved students learning Chinese dances. In the middle school grades teachers are trying to inculcate investigation and deduction skills through the study of science and social studies. While these strategies are yet to be embedded fully, the school is working in the right direction. Special education students are very well catered for in two separate classes in the lower grades and through intervention. Students of all attainment levels are fortunate in having access to after school academic support in small groups. The relatively inexperienced but hard-working faculty work well together and support one another. They know and respect their students and take seriously their accountability for improving students' achievement and progress. They are promoting differentiated instruction, but this is not yet sufficiently well rooted and does not hold students' interest or engage them actively in all lessons.

Budgetary and staffing decisions are made to support the drive for higher attainment, as illustrated by the appointment of the two knowledgeable coaches whose impact is already apparent. The principal works hard on scheduling to overcome the severe problems of very limited shared accommodation. Available space is very limited and includes three portable buildings, each containing two classrooms. There is no special accommodation for the shared use of a library, auditorium and gymnasium. No available space exists for a science lab or a computer room and there is no space for pull out rooms to support mandated services. In addition the office space is totally inadequate. Attendance is good and parents are regularly reminded of its importance.

**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 with well-developed features.**

The committed principal and co-director share their vision for the school, form an effective partnership and enjoy the respect of the community. They have high expectations of the staff that they select. They look for fluency in English and Spanish and commitment to a collaborative and constructivist approach to teaching.

Teachers are supported by an extensive, professional development calendar focused on achieving the school's goals and meeting teachers' needs identified through interviews and observations. To strengthen the curriculum and teachers' competence in the middle grades, the school has sensibly enlisted the support of Middle Start. A key feature of professional development is the impact of the two coaches whose enthusiasm and skill provide exemplary models. Teachers welcome their invaluable support in improving instruction. The school is aware that the next step is to provide further professional development to increase faculty's capacity to use data more effectively in planning and setting goals.

The principal's teaching observations, which change focus each month, and frequent observations and meetings with the coaches provide a clear overview and identify any professional development needs, which they discuss at their weekly meetings. Teachers also value opportunities to gain from observing their colleagues. As part of her constant

aim for improvement, the principal has recently established a range of grade level planning teams and school-wide collaborative teams. All members of staff belong to one or more teams which have precise functions meet regularly and minute their discussions. The school runs remarkably smoothly on a day-to-day basis in the light of the considerable constraints of the inadequate shared accommodation and constant disruptions from students belonging to the middle school that shares the building.

With so many issues to address, the principal carries a heavy administrative load, yet has no assistant principal to whom she can delegate some responsibility, such as oversight of the middle grades. The school has engineered many profitable links and partnerships including those with academic institutions and curriculum support agencies. With its empowerment status the school values and gains considerably from the support of its network, the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, and has forged collaborative links with two other K-8 dual language schools.

**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's special status as a dual language school, which was started by parents determined to have a community school with instruction in English and Spanish is fundamental. As a result, the school functions in cooperation with a range of groups. The governance council, which includes parent and community representatives, is the key player. One teacher methodically coordinates the useful contributions from teacher surveys, school leadership team and governance council deliberations, to produce the Comprehensive Education Plan. The plan is sensibly shared with teachers so that they understand the school's goals and their part in achieving them. In response, teachers are rightly expected to consider how effective their instruction is, where students have made the most progress and the reasons for this. They make this evaluation through their well-maintained assessment binders and by reviewing the students' portfolios of work. At another level the principal's classroom observations and walkthroughs, and coaches' informal observations monitor the implementation of the school's goals. Their weekly discussions consider the evidence collected alongside a review of the data to determine progress. Lacking is a summary of the evidence which might be helpful in improving the instruction generally. Other useful forms of monitoring are in place. Using the guiding principles for dual language education from the Center for Applied Linguistics, the administration and faculty spend time reflecting upon the curriculum and instruction to evaluate its assessment program in order to design next year's program. In addition, the impact of the arts grant is reviewed annually by an external consultant.

This array of monitoring is informative, but it is not fully coordinated, wholly collaborative or based on regular interim assessment. The involvement of parent and community representatives in the life of the school is impressive, but parents are not sufficiently involved in monitoring and revising the school's plans. For instance, the governance council's monitoring of the Comprehensive Education Plan is infrequent and its members do not take part in walkthroughs to inform their judgements.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>CYPRESS HILLS COMMUNITY SCHOOL (PS/MS 089)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<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>			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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>			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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<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.		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<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>	∅	✓	+
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>		X	
<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>	∅	✓	+
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>		X	
<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>	∅	✓	+
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>		X	