



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**The Langston Hughes School
Public School 233**

**9301 Avenue B
Brooklyn
NY 11236**

Principal: Aletta Seales

Dates of review: October 6 and 10 - 11, 2006

Reviewer: Roger Brown

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The school is a long-established elementary school with students in grades pre k - 5. There are currently 772 students enrolled, of whom 58 are special education students and 16 are English language learners, most of whom speak Haitian Creole as a first language.

The student population is 94% Black, 4% Hispanic, with the remaining 2% being White or other races. Attendance at the school is higher than is normally found in New York City schools, averaging just under 94% last year. The vast majority of students (83%) are title 1 eligible, which is higher than is normally found in New York City schools. There is a lot of movement of students to and from the school during the year. The improved test scores the school is achieving are attracting parents to move their children to the school part way through their elementary education. Over 22% of the students across all grades are new to the school this year; over 10% of the current 5th grade is new to the school this year.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- This school has a good understanding of the data available to it and staff are continuously striving to improve student achievement.
- The school leaders and faculty collaborate effectively to set demanding goals and to create improvement plans that are implemented well.
- Scheduling decisions are guided and modified as a result of reflective analysis of the data and students' needs, reinforcing the school's commitment to meeting the students' needs and to helping to build confidence in the school's success.
- The gentle, warm and caring leadership of the principal, who is ably supported by the assistant principal and the cabinet, sets the positive tone of the school.
- The atmosphere of encouragement and support in the school ensures good back up for teachers at all levels which is building significant capacity to secure and spread its long-term success.
- A small but very effective group of parents give great support to the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop the use and analysis of data to help to differentiate instruction for students ensuring that it relates to their particular needs.
- Improve the access to and use of technology within the school so that teachers can develop their use of data, and students can use the technology to support their knowledge, skills and understanding across all subjects.
- Support the professional development of teachers to improve their awareness and understanding of the programs and initiatives the school is introducing and follow up formal lesson observations to ensure that the agreed changes in practice are made.
- Improve the support for struggling students, especially those students who transfer to the school after the normal start time in the higher grades.
- Ensure that all teachers have the same consistently high expectations of what students in their classes can achieve.
- Do everything possible to engage with the small number of parents who are reluctant to fully commit themselves to the school in order to improve their children's attendance and punctuality.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The Langston Hughes School has moved forward and improved significantly over the past four years. The staff and parents report that now there is a warm, caring atmosphere, which strongly reflects the attitude and actions of the principal. Teachers are positive about the school and are proud of the improved performance that has been achieved by the students. The school has moved forward to a point where the results that the students achieve are above those achieved on average in City schools, and well above those in similar schools.

This success has brought with it difficulties. The area it serves has a relatively mobile population with many people moving in and out of the district all the time. The school's success is attracting many new students, including a substantial number who are already established in nearby schools. A number of parents whose children are struggling at their present schools are moving them to Langston Hughes in the hope that it will be able to improve their chances of success. In the present academic year, over 10% of the students in the current 5th grade are new to the school. At the end of the last academic year over 20% of the 5th grade had moved into the school during the year. This inward movement depressed the average scores the students achieved in 5th grade, as the school had insufficient time to get many of these new students up to standard. Those students who start in the school at pre-kindergarten and stay through to 5th grade make good progress, achieving standards that are better than would be expected on average. For these students the school is able to add significant value to their education.

The school is beginning to build a detailed picture of strengths and challenges for each of its students. This is helping teachers to make good use of the comprehensive range of programs the school now has in place. The areas for improvement identified in this report are mainly issues that the school has already identified for further work. However, the principal and her cabinet know that they still have work to do to make the processes more relevant to teachers in the classroom. The school has good capacity for further improvement.

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.

This school has a good understanding of the data available to it. Staff are working hard, and are constantly striving to improve student achievement. They use a wide range of assessments and tests to gain a good picture of each one of the students. This information is beginning to be used effectively to try and support all students in their development and in supporting their particular needs. There is still some way to go in refining and sharpening the practice, but the school has made a good start to using data creatively. The

principal ensures that her cabinet and the school leadership team have access to a comprehensive range of information and can interpret the data accurately in order to make the right decisions when allocating resources and planning learning programs.

The school's results remain above average for the City schools and well above the average for similar schools, but the results for the 5th grade students are no longer following the trend of improvement that is clearly in place for the lower grades. The school has a particular difficulty in that it is receiving more and more students who are entering the school in the higher grades either already struggling with their education or who have had relatively little formal education. The school recognizes that it has to expend more effort on identifying the needs of these students so that it can create successful intervention programs to support each individual student. The school is refining and developing the way it is tracking individual students progress and it is beginning to look at the progress of particular groups and classes to analyze what is working and what needs improving in the teaching. For instance, the principal has recognized that the mathematics results for the higher grades are uneven so she is proposing to encourage the teachers to specialize, with the idea that those who have more confidence in a particular subject can concentrate on teaching it to a number of classes in the grade rather than every teacher teaching every subject.

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 leaders and faculty collaborate very effectively to set demanding goals, create improvement plans, and implement them. The assistant principal works closely with the principal and gives excellent support to the initiatives that are being promoted. The high level of trust that exists between staff means that teachers are not afraid to reflect on their practice and make changes. The coaches work in close collaboration and their understanding of how their subject responsibilities interrelate makes a significant contribution to the school's efforts in raising standards. Teachers are very positive about the developments that are taking place in the school and believe that their meetings are well led and enable everyone to engage in honest discussion. There is a strong focus on what is best for the students and a desire to find creative ways in which they can be supported. The school has been successful in establishing consistently high expectations across grades and subjects, but has not yet achieved the same consistent quality in the way teaching is having an impact on the students' learning. As a result, there are still a few occasions when the teaching has too little impact on students' learning and their progress falters. Although the school has a clearly articulated comprehensive education plan which is shared with everyone, the principal is rightly concerned that teachers do not understand well enough how it relates to the work they do in the classroom.

The school communicates clearly with parents and works hard to involve them in their child's learning. For instance, the school's parent coordinator has set up a number of effective parent workshops. These are attended by a range of parents, both mothers and fathers, and some who are new to the school, as well as more who have been involved for a long time. The workshops give good support to children's development, emphasizing to parents how they can reinforce the work of the school and encourage their children's

academic achievement. Parents appreciate the ready access they have to staff and the timeliness with which teachers let them know of any concerns.

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.

This is a school where scheduling decisions are guided and modified as a result of reflective analysis of the data and students’ needs. This responsive approach reinforces the school’s commitment to meeting the students’ needs and is helping to build confidence in the school’s success. Teachers are reflective and thoughtful about their work and have a strong commitment to the success of their students.

Lessons are well planned, carefully structured and follow agreed routines and procedures to give the children a coherent and purposeful experience. The teachers have a good understanding of the ways in which they can help children to remain on task so that they can learn effectively. This helps the children to behave well in class and remain on task. However, some children, especially those older students who are new to the school or who have transferred to the school, struggle to conform to the school’s expectations in the hallways and other communal areas. In discussions with the teachers and observing them at work it is clear that the school sets a high priority on all adults working effectively together to support the children. The quality of these adult relationships transfers into warm and caring relationships between the adults and the children; this in turn gives the students security and confidence in the school.

Every student knows who to turn to if they need help. The positive attitudes in the school help to foster good attendance; presently this is higher than the average for City schools and even higher than that of similar schools. The school works hard to encourage students to be on time and attend well, but has a problem with a small number of families. Staff are ambitious for the level of attendance to rise even higher and try equally hard to convince the students that they need to avoid being tardy. Nevertheless, they recognize for this to happen they have to get even better levels of engagement from those parents who are reluctant to fully commit themselves to the school.

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 gentle, warm and caring leadership of the principal sets the very positive tone of the school and has been successful in persuading the staff to move with her in changing the school for the better. Everybody interviewed had similar stories to tell of the principal being a constant quiet presence around the school, listening to what her staff has to say, praising where appropriate and enabling all members of staff, whatever their level of responsibility and experience, to play a part in decision-making. It is clear that the school runs smoothly. In part this is because its procedures are continuously evaluated and amended when necessary; in part it is because the opinions of all members of staff are sought and valued. The cabinet debates matters robustly and its members are not afraid to admit that

something is not working as intended. When this happens they are prepared to make mid-course adjustments in the light of objective evidence.

There is a very strong imperative to ensure that learning is a continuous process for everyone involved in the school. Teachers' professional development is seen as one very important key in the school's drive to raise standards. This is helping to ensure that the school has the capacity to maintain the progress it has made and for there to be support for staff who wish to move on and get promotion. In encouraging staff to study and gain further qualifications, the principal is motivating them to seek out good ideas and practices. Good opportunities are created for teachers to work collaboratively and to learn from each other as well as to visit other successful schools.

All professional development is closely aligned to the school's goals and priorities for improvement; this ensures that everyone understands the direction in which the school is going. The many changes that have taken place over recent years and the breadth and complexity of some of the programs that have been introduced have left a few of the teachers uncertain as to where to concentrate their efforts.

The cabinet has a very good understanding of the capabilities of each individual member of staff. They acknowledge that although there is a comprehensive program of classroom observation, there is still room for improvement. Formal lesson observations are effective in identifying areas for development, but following these through and ensuring the changes are made is proving more difficult. The cabinet still needs to allocate more time to the process.

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.

This is a school where all staff have a strong focus on evaluating students' progress and where everyone tries hard to respond to the needs of the individual students. A significant element in the success of the school is that it has encouraged parents to become involved in the school's development as well as that of their children. The parents believe that they are listened to and as a result a small but very effective group of parents give great support to the school.

The information the school has built up from the regular assessments it makes of the students is growing in volume and complexity. As this information becomes harder to manage and control, staff are looking for ever more inventive ways of using it to support their work. Technology is already being used in a limited but effective way to develop students' skills, knowledge and understanding. The very capable and enthusiastic teacher responsible for this aspect of the school's work has developed successful programs of work with the students and is encouraging her colleagues to use technology to support and develop their teaching. There is recognition in the school that more work is needed to improve the access to and use of technology within the school so that teachers can develop and exploit their use of data, and students can use the technology to support their development across all subjects.

This is a school that has been improved and transformed over recent years and, even though everyone knows there is still some way to go, the outlook is very positive.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Langston Hughes School (Ps 233)	∅	✓	+
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	