



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Charles H Houston Academy**

**Elementary School / Intermediate School 332**

**51 Christopher Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11212**

**Principal: Deborah Pierce**

**Dates of review: May 30, 2007**

**Reviewers: Derek Pattinson and Terry Brown**

# Content of the report

## **Part 1: The School Context**

Information about the school

## **Part 2: Overview**

What the school does well  
What the school needs to improve

## **Part 3: Main Findings**

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

## **Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Charles H Houston Academy has 515 students on roll from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school's student population is made up of 62% Black, 37% Hispanic and very small numbers of Asian, White and others. The building has recently undergone interior and exterior upgrades. Due to its barrier free status, the school has students with various health and ambulatory limitations. The proportion of English language learners at 6% is much smaller than the average in City and similar schools. Approximately 12% of the school's population are special education students. This is a larger proportion than typically found in similar schools. The school has received Title 1 funding for a number of years. The average attendance of 88% is below that of similar and City schools.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The well respected and experienced principal provides caring and supportive leadership and a culture where effort, achievement and encouragement are valued.
- Art, technology and English language art programs are given a good emphasis.
- The school runs smoothly and students enjoy their lessons.
- Adults have good relationships with students and so they feel confident about asking for help when needed.
- Surveys and evaluations help students and teachers to become more self-critical to help them more accurately reflect on what works well and what needs doing.
- The nurturing atmosphere and family-like qualities ensures that students receive high levels of care.
- The school is using data effectively to track the performance of students and to group them according to their needs.
- The Comprehensive Education Plan provides an effective steer for the school, and regular checks are made of progress towards the achievement of key goals.
- A combination of formal and informal approaches helps to promote effective collaboration.
- There is some effective instruction practice, which challenges and engages students.

### What the school needs to improve

- Sustain efforts to improve parental engagement in their children's learning, in particular to help promote higher levels of attendance.
- Introduce and monitor strategies to raise achievement in mathematics and science, especially in grades 7 and 8.
- Continue to involve students in setting and reviewing progress towards clear goals that they know and understand.
- Provide more opportunities for teachers to engage in cross-grade communication to build on students' achievements and plan new goals.
- Target professional development to help teachers differentiate instruction more effectively, especially for the highest achievers, and monitor its impact on outcomes.
- Continue to gather and analyze data to help teachers understand how data can be used to set appropriate targets and refine instructional programs for different groups.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

'Working as a community to develop the potential of each child' is at the heart of everything the school does. The nurturing atmosphere and family like qualities ensure that all students receive high levels of care. One student commented that 'it is a good place to be and everyone is comfortable here'. Relationships are good at all levels throughout the school, students enjoy their lessons and the school runs smoothly. This is in no small part to the well respected and experienced principal's empowering, caring and supportive leadership. She has helped provide a culture where innovation, collaboration and success are sought and valued. As a result, students and teachers grow together, showing mutual respect, which helps provide a firm platform for learning, and ensures that students are confident to ask any adult for help and advice about any academic or personal concern.

The principal is supported well by an administrative team and teachers who have the same committed drive to develop each student's personal and academic skills and knowledge. However, professional development is not yet high profile enough in the school's work, such as, to ensure that teachers from different grades work together more to help develop greater collaboration and cooperation for the benefit of students.

The school works hard to establish good relationships with parents to establish effective cooperation to enable them to help meet their child's goals, and to raise its attendance figures, which are below similar schools. However, in both these areas it is not as successful as it wants to be.

### **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 data collected by the school enables it to establish a clear picture of the overall performance and progress made by its students. The principal maintains a data file which is regularly studied and updated and contributes to this process. Analysis of the most recent State test scores is already underway to help the school identify areas requiring development. The data gathering process is facilitated by administrators who are adept in the use of technology. As a result, whole school information is shared in an accessible way, enabling comparisons of performance across grades and classes to be easily made. In addition the school uses its own data to good effect to understand the performance and progress of each student, class and grade. As a result of its data gathering procedures, students are grouped from test and assessment outcomes in order to help align instruction to their needs. Intervention programs are established for 'at risk' students to accelerate their learning. However, data is not yet being used to best effect to benefit some groups of pupils, such as, English language learners.

Trends in performance are noted, as are comparisons with similar schools and among different ethnicities. State and City test results are scrutinized carefully to monitor how well students are doing. The weaker performance in mathematics in comparison to other subjects, especially English language arts, has been noted, especially among older students. The school has taken steps to strengthen instruction, which have started to improve outcomes, although it recognizes that there is still much to do. Students' progress in tests is recorded, and students are grouped from test results. However, teachers do not always have enough information to identify specific weaknesses in conceptual understanding or skills. As a result, it is more difficult for them to refine their instructional programs so that they meet the full range of needs within a class and to target those who are close to level boundaries to help boost their performance or stop them regressing. The school recognizes the need to establish greater consistency of practice across the school in order to secure further improvement in student outcomes.

**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 administration, teachers and support staff meet regularly to interpret data from State tests and set objectively measurable annual goals for improvement for students, including for those that are most vulnerable. The meeting structure facilitates effective collaboration so that there is a shared understanding among teachers working within grades of what is to be achieved. However, there are not enough opportunities at present for cross-grade communication to enable teachers to build systematically on what students know and understand so that they can become more involved in the goal setting and reviewing process.

The principal uses the annual reporting process to enable her to contribute to goal setting for each student, classroom and grade level. However, she recognizes that the performance and progress of students is not good enough in mathematics and to a lesser extent in science, especially for older students. Teachers are aware of this too and the school is already putting appropriate strategies and goals in place to help address this. However, because not all teachers align instruction appropriately to students' precise needs, short-term goals for students are not always challenging enough, especially in mathematics and science, to help students reach or exceed the standard.

All reading books are leveled so that all students know what they must do to reach the next level. In English language arts, surveys and evaluations of work in portfolios are being used increasingly by students to help them become more self-critical and to reflect on their efforts and achievements, to help support the high expectations conveyed to students by their teachers. This is clearly helping them develop ownership in what they need to do to improve further and become more involved in setting goals for themselves. Despite the school's best efforts, many parents are not involved enough in helping students achieve their goals. However, parents like the school, believing it to be 'a community within a community' and are kept well informed about, for example, outcomes of State tests. Most students value the aspirations the school has for them and most are eager to do well.

**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 curriculum is designed to generate meaningful data and emphasize students’ personal development alongside their mandated academic work. However, the school has identified a need to scrutinize its curriculum programs to ensure that they match students’ needs more precisely. English language arts and visual art programs are strong features of the school’s work and enrich student experiences. The principal takes pride in advances in technology in school to help students master twenty first century skills. Most teachers are fully aware of their accountability for the achievements of the students in their care. They want their students to do well and use performance data increasingly to inform their instructional programs. Teachers often demonstrate secure subject knowledge, which often underpins some lively instruction, resulting in positive engagement from the students. However, currently a few classrooms are not lively, fun places to help instill in students a love of learning and work is not differentiated enough, especially for high achieving students. Inter-visitations are used successfully to share and develop good practice, although the school has identified that more are needed. Student conferencing is used well to help align instruction, especially for special education students and English language learners.

In addition to careful scheduling, the school has also aligned its budget and staffing according to the needs of its students. For example, a mathematics coach has been appointed to help accelerate learning and teachers have weekly time to plan and talk together to review student outcomes and monitor progress toward goals. Attendance is a high priority, with recognition and celebration of full attendance, and is monitored closely in class and at whole school level. There are clear procedures to follow up absentees and latecomers. However, the level of attendance, at 88%, does not match the efforts of the school to promote it and the school is working proactively to secure more engagement from parents to help improve it to the level of similar schools. Relationships throughout the school are very good, and there is mutual respect between staff and students. As a result, a firm platform is provided from which students grow and learn.

**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 experienced principal is well respected by the whole of the school community for her vision for the school. She has selected staff carefully based on their high expectations and willingness to continue to develop their professional expertise. She has helped establish a culture where students’ personal development is as important as their academic successes and in which both teachers and students blossom and flourish within a caring and supportive family atmosphere. Good partnerships with support services helps students meet their academic goals. For example, most special education students and English language learners make sound progress because of the support they receive.

The principals, cabinet and coaches visit classrooms regularly to check on the quality of instruction and that agreed programs are being implemented effectively. They have identified a need for a better alignment of work to students' needs in some classrooms, more sharing of good practice and greater use of differentiation to challenge all students, especially the higher achievers.

Professional development is therefore seen by all as the key to addressing these issues and to enable the school to improve further. Regular meetings of different groups provide good opportunities for teachers within grades to use data to evaluate instructional programs and share ideas. Well attended lunch-time sessions facilitate further discussion. A range of external consultants provide additional expertise which benefit students. However, the school does not yet monitor the impact of professional development on classroom strategies and student outcomes. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis, with clear routines that are well understood and are generally followed by the school community.

**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 Comprehensive Education Plan is a working tool to which many stakeholders have ownership. It provides an effective steer for the school and enables comparisons of students' progress within and across classrooms from collected data. Regular checks are made towards the achievement of its key goals. Detailed evaluation and analysis from one plan helps drive successive plans. Monthly meetings of the school leadership team ensure that there is a strategic evaluation of progress towards goals set and that there is a broad understanding of what the expectations for students are and the actions needed to achieve them. Action plans are regularly scrutinized, goals are changed if deemed not to be effective and there is much discussion about the key areas of focus. Sometimes discussion from action plans leads to improved practice, such as, the introduction of picture books across the school to help generate in students a love of literature. As yet the goals focus on students reaching the required standard in the testing grades. However, the Comprehensive Education Plan does not have goals which identify the students who have the potential to exceed the standards by setting high levels of challenge for them.

Grade teachers, the administrative team and the academic intervention team meet regularly to scrutinize data systematically and discuss the effectiveness of the delivery of instructional programs. By these means the school can regularly check that all students, for example, special education students and English language learners, are working towards their targets.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Charles H. Houston Academy (PS/IS 332)</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	