



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

North Star Academy

Middle School 340

227 Sterling Place

Brooklyn

New York 11238

Principal: Jean Williams

Dates of review: February 14 - 15, 2007

Reviewer: Stephen Walker

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

North Star Academy, MS 340, is a small intermediate school of 349 students from grade 6 through 8. It is located in the Grand Army Plaza area of Brooklyn. The school is housed in a historic two-story building which was built in 1867. The school population is predominantly Black (93%) with a small number of Hispanic, Asian and White students. Over 3% of the students are recent immigrants from the Caribbean. The majority of students are selected for the school through an entrance examination. A small number of special educational students have been placed in the school, representing 2% of the total enrollment. English language learners account for less than 1% of the student population. Around 63% of the students are Title 1 eligible which is above that of similar schools but below the City average. Attendance is 95.7% which is much higher than either similar schools or the City average. The new principal was appointed to the school in September 2006.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is high performing when compared to City and similar schools.
- The nurturing atmosphere of the school identifies the individual and this is greatly appreciated by both students and parents.
- The positive culture in the school encourages responsible behavior and good attendance.
- The students are proud of their place at the school and consequently there is a sense of student commitment to the school.
- The principal has introduced a refreshing and reflective vision for continuous improvement and she is greatly respected by parents, staff and students.
- The school runs smoothly on a day to day basis supported by committed teams of teachers and support staff.
- There are good systems of guidance and pupil personnel which support the performance and personal development of students.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop the classroom assessment process and the analysis of data so that it becomes an integral part of teaching and learning in order to boost achievement.
- Develop the sharing of best practice in order to raise the quality of teaching and learning in the school.
- Ensure that expectations for units of study are clear and students know exactly what they have to do to improve their grades.
- Develop assessment tools to inform more rigorous and structured academic intervention and enrichment activities for more able students.
- Review the staffing structure and organization of teachers in order to improve the quality of instruction and learning.
- Build on the recently introduced systems and structures for monitoring and evaluating the progress of individual students, groups and cohorts in order to eliminate underachievement.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school.

This is a high performing school when compared to City and similar schools. However, student progress has not been sufficiently tracked in the past and there is evidence of underachievement by a significant number of students. The new principal has ensured that the school is beginning to use assessment data in order to gain an objective view of student progress. Teachers are not using assessment data well to understand students' learning or to set challenging goals to accelerate performance. The provision of intervention and enrichment activities requires more structure.

The nurturing atmosphere of the school emphasizes the individual and this is greatly appreciated by both students and parents. Students demonstrate the ability to listen and work independently but they are not being fully challenged by all teachers. There is a growing program of professional development that is clearly focused on raising awareness of data and accelerating student progress.

The principal has introduced a refreshing and reflective vision for continuous improvement and she is greatly respected by parents, staff and students. The school has begun to evaluate its performance and is seeking new ways to improve the learning and progress of the students. Priorities for improvement have been highlighted and the school is more focused on student performance and progress.

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school is beginning to use assessment data in order to gain an objective view of student progress. The principal is making full use of the data that is now available through the New York City Department of Education. She has analyzed previous performance over the last three years and highlighted the unsatisfactory progress for some students across the subject areas and specifically in mathematics. A key focus for the school is to ensure that all students make at least satisfactory progress and add value to previous achievement. She has also used the accountability status reports and the annual school report to track the differences in subject areas and between classes and grades and to identify differences in the performances between boys and girls in different content areas.

Detailed records are kept on the small number of English language learners and special education students in the school. Teachers are increasingly being asked to use data to identify underachievement. Students are selected for intervention services during the extended day and after-school activities if they gain below standard levels in the periodic assessments and test results. The school is presently focusing on raising the achievement of those students who fail to meet the standard in English language arts and mathematics.

The school is aware of the need to further interrogate the available data in order to compare its results in greater depth with similar schools across the City. The principal is using the findings of her analysis to encourage the staff to develop strategies to address the issues of insufficient student progress and gender differences in performance.

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 undeveloped.

Teachers do not use assessment data well enough to understand student learning or to set challenging goals to accelerate performance. The school has recognized the need to develop a consistent grading policy across all subject areas. Measurements of progress are clearer in English language arts and mathematics. Teachers are now given basic attainment information in English language arts and mathematics for each student but no details of prior achievement are provided in the other content areas. Improving student performance and progress have become key priorities for all teachers as exemplified by the use of periodic assessment information in grade meetings to identify underachievers in the cohort and discussed strategies for improvement. Teachers are becoming more accountable for the progress of their students but they do not formally set specific individual, aspirational performance goals that are shared with the principal, parents and students.

Academic intervention programs have recently begun to support students who require additional help with their work. The school targets support in small groups in literacy and mathematics during the extended day although this is not fully effective. The teachers also use this time to provide extension activities for the more able students. The range of assessment tools are limited and do not fully inform the intervention programs to meet specific needs of students. The academic intervention and enrichment activities do not have sufficient structure or rigor in order to be effective.

The school works closely with parents who value the work of the school. Attendance at the parent teacher conferences is good. Communication with the parents is good and this supports student achievement. Parents and caregivers are provided with regular reports that are informative, although they do not yet provide clear targets for students to aim for.

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 undeveloped.

The school has selected a curriculum that aligns with the mandatory requirements in English language arts, mathematics and science. Some teachers modify their programs of study in light of the test results. For example, Impact Mathematics has recently been introduced in order to supplement the present course and target specific skills areas. However, very few teachers across the school identify the key skills and knowledge required for each unit of work so student expectations are not clear and they rarely know exactly what they have to do to improve their grades. All students have lessons in technology, art and physical education but there is no provision at the moment in music,

drama and dance. There are limited opportunities for extra-curricular activities. Very few teachers are using assessment information to differentiate work within classes in order to address the individual needs of students.

The assignment of teachers and the scheduling of classes have not been traditionally guided by the drive to improve student performance. Very few teachers have their own classrooms so there is no real ownership of rooms. It is not clear how budgeting decisions in the past have been driven by needs revealed by student data. However, there is evidence that more thought is now being given to these matters, it has been recently decided to terminate the present after-school activities and use the money to support a revised program including a Saturday academy to boost achievement. The school has used the faculty and conferencing days to introduce a necessary professional development program. The principal has also identified the need to undertake a creative program of refurbishment and redecoration to improve the learning environment.

Teaching rarely engages or challenges students. In the better lessons teachers actively engage students in discussions and a variety of learning activities. Display work does not always provide a stimulating environment for learning. Classroom management in some classes is not effective. Technology is not used well as a tool for teaching and learning.

There are good systems of guidance and pupil personnel which support the performance and personal development of students. The students are proud of their place at the school and consequently there is a sense of student commitment to the school. They know that their concerns will be taken seriously. The high levels of attendance reflect highly on the successful work of the school aid, attendance teacher and parent co-coordinator.

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 undeveloped.

The new principal is acting as the essential catalyst for change in the school as she develops a real understanding of the priorities for improvement. Staff acknowledge that they are working in a more demanding environment as she expects greater accountability for their work. Teachers feel that she appreciates their work and wants them to be fully involved in school developments.

Teachers have not previously been selected on their ability to use assessment data to improve student performance and progress. The principal has provided additional training to increase awareness of the need to use data to drive instruction and increase the achievement of all students in the school. Teachers welcome the training and appreciate the extra attention that is given to their individual professional development needs. There is now a sense of urgency to use professional development to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Lesson observations are established and all teachers have a formal observation by the principal or assistant principal with feedback at least once per year. However, there is an inconsistency in approach and the exercise is not always rigorous and developmental for all members of staff. There is little evidence of inter-visitations between teachers in order to share good classroom practice.

The instructional team meets regularly as an extended cabinet in order to discuss whole school improvement strategies. Opinions are sought and better ways of doing things are discussed. The grade meetings provide opportunities for all teachers to contribute to developments in the school. However, teams are not fully effective in planning, evaluating and revising plans. The present cabinet and team structure does not facilitate the required amount of monitoring and evaluation of performance in subjects and at grade level.

The school runs smoothly on a day to day basis, supported by committed teams of teachers and support staff. The principal has raised expectations, introduced important systems and is well respected by staff, students and parents. She has made a significant contribution through her presence and support around school to develop a positive culture and proactive behavior. The school has good links with a number of community based organizations including the Brooklyn Centre for the Urban Environment, St.Jude's Childrens' Hospital and the local nursing home. The school is seeking to develop more links with arts and cultural organizations as well as developing commercial partnerships.

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 undeveloped.

The school has begun to evaluate its performance and seek new ways to improve the learning and progress of all the students. Staff are being encouraged to get involved in discussions on school improvement and to consider the importance of using data in order to support student progress. It is early days and the evaluation of plans is not yet embedded in school systems. The principal has begun to undertake a whole school analysis of assessment data and to highlight the unsatisfactory progress of many students despite their above average attainment. The academic intervention program has been modified although there is more work to be done in this area. The responsibilities of the school aids have been changed in order to increase their effectiveness in the school. The school culture is changing and the staff are recognizing and adjusting to the new demands of evaluation and accountability.

Comparisons of student progress within and across the school are not yet being used well as a tool for measuring the success of plans and interventions. However, the principal is raising the bar and her own goals and objectives for the year and those of the staff are focused on improving student progress. These goals are not incorporated in the Comprehensive Education Plan so it is not yet a working document with clear actions and measurable outcomes. The school is undeveloped in using periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress to revise plans. The administration now expects all teachers to collect student data, monitor student progress and adjust instruction accordingly. A start has been made and all teachers are now more aware of the growing expectations of using evaluative information to inform plans for the school and instruction.

The principal is currently setting up systems so that there are clear monitoring, evaluation and planning structures. There will be a mid year review in March and she has already made a number of changes for the current academic year. Priorities for improvement have been highlighted and the school is more focused on student performance and progress. The local instructional superintendent provides good support for the school. The school has the capacity for further improvement as it moves into an essential period of change.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: North Star Academy (MS 340)	∅	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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		