



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Academy for Environmental Leadership**

**High School 403**

**400 Irving Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11237**

**Principal: Nilda Gomez-Katz**

**Dates of review: May 7 - 8, 2007**

**Reviewer: Barry King**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Academy for Environmental Leadership came into existence in September 2006 as the fourth school on the site of a large high school that has now closed. It currently occupies part of one floor of a large campus and has 105 students in grade 9. Approximately one-third of the students enrolled after the start of the academic year. It is expected that the school will grow to its full size over the next three years, when it will have 432 students. Of its present students, 80% are Hispanic, 18% Black, 1% Asian and other and 1% White. Special education students account for 7% of the total and are all instructed in general education classes. Some 15% are English language learners. The main language other than English is Spanish. The school is Title 1 eligible with 69% of students qualifying. Attendance, at almost 87%, is above the City average.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The staff is hard working and shows commitment to the progress and welfare of the students, which are key factors in the respect that students have for them.
- The professional development program is extensive and aligned to the staff's training needs.
- The program of home visits undertaken by the principal builds knowledge about parents and students and is appreciated by them.
- Attendance is above the City average.
- The school has well-developed arrangements for reviewing the progress of, and setting goals for, those most at risk of falling behind grade level.
- The administration holds teachers to account through their lesson observations, and is supportive of them.
- The mandated curriculum is in place.
- Routines to gather data and use it to set goals have been established and competence in handling data is improving.
- The schedule allows good opportunities for collaboration and teachers are reflective about what they do.

### What the school needs to improve

- Based on priorities to deal with the school's weaknesses, set measurable goals for improvement behind which all stakeholders can unite.
- Establish, and apply consistently, basic classroom routines, so that students come to class prepared to work and behave well.
- Develop teaching styles to provide work for students that they find more engaging.
- Use the increasing amounts of data to differentiate instruction to match work better to the needs of both the less able and more able students.
- Improve the students' independent learning skills, including writing, that will enable them to engage with their learning and therefore succeed at school and college.
- Collate data on the students' achievement by ethnic group and gender, and make more use of data to make comparative evaluations.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

Much has been done by the principal and her colleagues to create a new school with a distinct identity that is valued by the parents and enjoyed by the students. Important procedures and structures have been put in place for the smooth, everyday running of the school, such as the mandated curriculum and a schedule that is understood by staff and students. A culture of gathering and using data to set goals and plan instruction is developing. The small staff works closely together and the respect that teachers have for the students is appreciated by them. Attendance is good. The professional development program is extensive and aligned to the needs of both school and staff, and in some areas it has had success in improving practice.

The school is poised for expansion. However, it has not yet given sufficient priority to tackling endemic weaknesses in classroom routines, students' engagement in learning and the customization of learning programs to students' needs. The administration has an accurate knowledge of the school through its evaluation procedures and so knows where the problems lie. As it constructs its first Comprehensive Education Plan, it is in a good position to confront its difficulties, and to set goals and align resources for tackling them. This is essential for the school's future success.

### 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 collates data from periodic assessments so that the administration has a clear overview of the achievement of each student and, through this, of each class and of grade 9 as a whole. At the classroom level, teachers have begun to use assessment binders that contain evidence of students' progress, although these are at an early stage of development and they have yet to use them effectively to set goals and align instruction. The school keeps records of how well English language learners master their new language. Adequate records are also kept of the progress of special education students. However, the school does not analyze the achievement of students by ethnic group.

The school has had a particular interest in monitoring the progress of students in shelter and in foster homes, and has a clear view of their academic progress and social and emotional needs. The school's leaders recognize that boys perform differently to girls, but do not analyze their outcomes by gender in a formal way so that the data can be readily shared. The school's capacity for comparative evaluation is limited in part because it is in its first year of existence and does not have a Report Card that would enable it to compare its performance against other schools and its own past record. However, the school does monitor its performance and strategies through an informal partnership with another school that is at a similar stage of development. It is aware of how well students perform in the

different subjects of the curriculum but does not compare certain groups with each other, since data is not collected on ethnicity and gender.

**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 has adopted Ten Principles for Effective Schools from their partner organization, New Visions for Public Schools, to secure 92% attendance and 80% graduation rate. It keeps good records of its progress towards the first. It is at too early a stage in its development to have data on the second, though it knows from scores on periodic assessments how well it is progressing towards this challenging goal. The staff has good opportunities through the schedule to collaborate with each other in the setting of goals and aligning of instruction. This is particularly true for students at risk of falling behind grade level, through the weekly ‘kid talk’ sessions where individual students causing concern are considered. The goals for English language learners, special education and at risk students are personalized. This is not the case for the majority of students, who have a general goal to pass their Regents tests. Expectations for students are high in the sense that they are encouraged to do as well as they can but the more capable students are not given explicit goals that would stretch them further. The school goes to unusual lengths to ensure that information from parents and students is included in their goal setting and planning through an extensive program of home visits in addition to the usual channels of communication.

As a new school, it is currently going through a collaborative process to devise its first Comprehensive Education Plan. The absence of a plan is one reason why the school does not currently have shorter-term goals for its development around which all stakeholders can unite. It is in the process of fashioning such goals for its development over the next year. The school’s leaders know that it is vital that the weaknesses in the school, such as the poor behavior and the lack of engagement in class, are high priorities that must feature prominently in its planning if the school is to improve the quality of instruction.

**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 its mandated curriculum in place and has a pacing calendar for its delivery. It has specific programs to support special education students and those at risk, and also to help students new to the country to learn English. It recognizes that its next step is to ensure that teachers’ programs are developed further to encourage the independent learning skills, including writing, that students will need if they are to be successful at both school and college. The range of extra-curricular activities is very limited, partly due to the fact that the school is new and currently very small. Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are aligned to instructional needs, and the last allows opportunities for staff to reflect together on their work. The school’s above average attendance reflects the strong

arrangements it has in reacting to absence, the partnership it has built with parents and the fact that the students enjoy being in the school.

Teachers are held accountable for the quality of their instruction, as the school's monitoring records testify. Progress has been made by the administration in ensuring that there is consistency in displaying to the students the agenda for each lesson, and in mixing group work with plenary interaction to help the students participate more actively in lessons. Staff work hard to prepare their lessons and they respect and relate well to their students, something that is much appreciated by them. However, the students do not respond well in class. Many arrive late and do not observe basic routines for learning, such as concentrating on their work and listening to each other. The behavior by a minority is frequently bad and many other students do not adopt studious attitudes, mixing social talk with task completion. At best, students tend to comply reluctantly with the teachers' requirements and rarely show genuine engagement with the work that springs from an intrinsic interest in it. In some classes, different tasks are set for different groups, but work is typically not differentiated to customize tasks to students' individual learning needs. As a result, the less capable students are unable to access some of the work, while the more able students are not stretched. In both cases, the students do not enjoy what they are doing or make as much progress as they should. The unsatisfactory behavior spills outside the classroom and students are noisy in their movement through the school, and a minority engages in verbal bullying. However, students feel, if they are troubled by this or other problems, the staff are willing to go the extra mile to help them.

**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 school has developed suitable criteria to help it recruit teachers who are correctly qualified and share its culture and ambitions. The procedures for screening candidates are developing and the administration recognizes that it needs to do more to involve teachers, parents and students in the recruitment process. Professional development has been extensive and valued by the teachers, many of whom are new to the profession. Development sessions are regular and matched to both the teachers' individual needs and the school's need to improve, for example, in the use of data in planning. The development program has had some success in standardizing aspects of teaching, such as greater use of group work, but it has not yet secured differentiated instruction.

The principal and her senior colleagues are frequently in classrooms to observe practice. They feed their findings back to staff and use them as a basis for developing the teachers' skills. Formal lesson observations are recorded thoroughly, with the areas for improvement clearly stated. So far, the staff has had little opportunity to learn from each other through intervisitations and peer observation. The school is very small and so the normal range of staff teams is not found, but the school has scheduled the staff to meet together on a frequent basis for professional development and other meetings. This allows staff to share practice with each other, even if it is for the most part across subject boundaries. External partnerships are limited in extent, as is to be expected in such a new school, but the school has made good strides in building relationships with parents.

The principal has worked hard to establish this new school and her commitment to its success is widely acknowledged. Parents and students both speak warmly of her home visits, which have helped to build bridges to them. Many important procedures are in place

or are developing. On a daily basis, the school runs smoothly. However, a great deal has been attempted and not all of it has been successful. The principal is aware that the future success of the school depends on how effectively she leads her colleagues to confront and deal with the weaknesses in behavior, learning and teaching that are restricting the achievement and engagement of many students.

**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 has monitored and evaluated its performance through the data from interim assessments and other information, such as qualitative data that arises from walkthrough observations. On the basis of this it has taken action to remedy some elements of weaker teaching, for example, by aligning professional development to perceived needs. It has also adjusted programs for students in the light of their progress, for example by de-certifying special education students who have reached their goals sufficiently well to become part of general education. The data the administration has collected has led it to make changes in its intervention arrangements for students, for example in how at risk students are grouped together. New criteria and procedures for selecting staff have been developed on the basis of the perceived weaknesses in former arrangements.

In this new school much has had to be put in place in a short time but it has not been able to monitor its progress towards overarching goals normally found in a Comprehensive Education Plan, since it does not yet have one. This is, however, still a very small school and the administration has a good understanding of what is working and what needs improving. Leaders have acted on this knowledge in some respects, such as improving the use of group work in lessons. But they have not been agile enough in mounting a concerted strategy to deal with the core classroom weaknesses that they have observed and documented. They know that the prioritization of these matters, along with clear goals and well-directed strategies for improvement, are the essential next steps in the school's development.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Academy for Environmental Leadership (HS 403)</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	