

School for Democracy and Leadership

**600 Kingston Avenue
Brooklyn, New York, 11203**

Principal: Ms. Nancy Gannon

Dates of Review: 26 – 28 April 2006

**Reviewer: Pat Cox
Cambridge Education**

CONTENT OF THE REPORT

Part 1: The School Context

Background information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

What is the school's overall performance

How well does it meet New York City's evaluation criteria

Other key observations

PART1: The School Context.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

School for Leadership and Democracy was founded in 2004 with the support of a grant from the Gates Foundation. It is now part of the New York City Department of Education's Autonomy Zone. Since the school opened it has doubled in size and now has 287 students on roll in 6th, 7th, 9th and 10th Grades. The school will continue to grow so that by 2007 it will have Grades 6 to 12. The school's underlying philosophy centers on developing the students' understanding of the nature of democracy and leadership, and their ability to influence events. Most students are of African - Caribbean decent. Few students are at an early stage of learning English. Over half are entitled to a free school lunch. The students enter Grade 6 with a range of achievement which overall is below the average for their age.

PART 2: OVERVIEW.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- The principal provides very strong leadership for the school and works closely with the teacher who also has some administrative roles. Working together they provide a very effective leadership team.
- The staff members have a shared vision for the school, based on a commitment to its philosophy, which is reflected in the 'change' projects that the students carry out.
- The school has high expectations for what its students can achieve and encourages them to do as well as they can.
- Many students do well and achieve good grades because of the effective teaching.
- The staff works extremely hard to plan their lessons and to give the students personal and academic advice and guidance.
- The school cares well for its students and understands their individual needs, particularly through the work of the advisory classes.
- The school is developing detailed data about the students' progress and using this to target interventions for those students who need additional support.
- Team planning systems are developing well in some grades, so that the teachers work together effectively under good leadership, with more experienced teachers supporting those whose expertise is at an early stage.

WHAT THE SCHOOL NEEDS TO IMPROVE

- Develop the way in which the school plans for the future, over the medium and long-term, so that the organizational systems are evident and staff members are clear where their roles fit in the wider picture of school improvement.
- Work closely with students and their parents to develop the students' ability to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Develop common systems for managing the students' behavior, with consistent expectations, rewards and sanctions.
- Enhance the use of data so that all teachers have a clear picture of each student's progress and use it more consistently to differentiate the student's work.
- Improve the program for math so that standards are closer to those in other subjects.
- Continue to improve scope and sequence to ensure that there is progression and continuity between and through the grades, particularly in preparation for grades 8, 11 and 12.

PART 3: MAIN FINDINGS

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school, which uses data but has underdeveloped systems for planning for improvement.

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

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient overall, with some well-developed features.

Teachers use their rubrics to assess the students' work each review period to show the progress being made. Students are sometimes involved in the process, evaluating their own work and that of others. This information and the test results are used to measure whether they are making sufficient progress. Teachers plan using the standards as a starting point, so that they are clear about what they want their students to achieve by the end of the year. The staff in each grade uses their ongoing assessments to discuss at their weekly team meetings the progress of and concerns about individual students. These procedures ensure that the school has a reasonably clear picture of how the students are progressing. There is sufficient information to create an honor roll, to promote students and to identify those who require additional support.

The staff works together to identify trends and patterns in student learning. For example, analysis has revealed that many are reaching the standards expected, but the performance of boys is not as strong as that of girls. As a result of this analysis, appropriate strategies have been put in place to tackle this issue. Similarly, the school has identified that standards in math are not high enough and has begun the process of planning to improve them.

While each student has an advisor who monitors their overall performance and supports them both personally and academically, there is still more work to do on this aspect of data analysis and applied information. For example, there is not yet a picture of whether the students' progress varies according to criteria; for example there is no disaggregation for those relatively few students who are English language learners. Incidents of poor behavior and numbers of students who have been excluded or suspended from the school are recorded appropriately. There is an awareness that these occurrences have a negative impact on individual progress, but as yet, there is not a fully developed a system for analyzing this in any detail.

Quality Statement 2: 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 available data is used to identify appropriate interventions for particular groups. For example, the special education teacher works with those students who need specific support with reading and also team-teaches in English and math lessons. Support is provided through a mixture of in-class support and pullout services to work in small groups. Extra work is given to those who are in danger of failing and there has been a comprehensive summer school program to support areas of weakness. Teachers volunteer their time to help those who need it. The understandings gained in grade team meetings and advisory sessions are used to put in place strategies to assist individual students. However, not all grade teams are working effectively on developing support strategies and therefore the system does not always succeed with all students. This is especially the case with older students. The school has high expectations, which it transmits to both staff and students through the higher than average targets it sets for test passing rate and graduation rates.

There is some consultation with students on the individual targets that are set for them. They know how well they are doing and receive a progress report every two weeks. Advisory staff involves parents in the process, although this aspect is taking some time to develop. Teachers have goals for improving the quality of their instruction and the test and progress data are examined to check that targets have been reached. However, there are no specific targets for each class in each subject.

Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient with some well-developed areas.

The curriculum committee's work on plans to develop the structures and systems, the program for the year and the scope and sequence. The next step is to align the curriculum across each of the grades and each subject area. However, this work is complicated by the fact that the school started with Grades 6 and 9, and now has 6, 7, 9 and 10, with no Grade 8. Some innovative courses have been developed and there are suitable measures to develop the students' attitudes to learning through the advisory sessions. The projects that students study, based on 'Change' for themselves and the community, are well-developed and contribute to their understanding of their part in that community.

The school's planning of teachers' time is proficient. For example, there is common planning time for grade team meetings and an expectation that all staff will take some leadership in the school. However, their roles have not been delineated clearly enough; one consequence is that the students are not always well managed. For example, the corridors are often noisy and turbulent during breaks between lessons and much of the principal's time is caught up in crisis and behavior management. This has a negative

impact on her ability to follow through on planning and development, hampering whole-school progress. There are suitable plans to appoint a permanent assistant principal and a dean to support the principal in her leadership role and in managing behavior around school.

The principal and acting assistant principal observe lessons frequently and have a well-developed knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the staff. Teachers are given written and verbal feedback about their strengths and areas where they need to improve, which are followed up during subsequent discussions. Test results are shared, so that all students know how well they have performed in relation to others. The advisory teachers know their advisees well, academically and personally, and give much support. Students appreciate these sessions and feel that they benefit from them.

Students enjoy those classes, which are interesting and well-prepared, but other lessons are disrupted by inappropriate behavior, so that students learn little during them. While most teachers have expectations about the students' behavior and the quality of their work, there are few common systems evident in the school. Many students have not developed good learning habits and are over-reliant on their teachers, lacking initiative and responsibility. Consequently, while the teachers are working hard, the students are often less engaged.

However, relationships are still good between staff and students and most students feel that there is an adult in school that they trust and can confide in. Attendance is monitored, with patterns of non-attendance and lack of punctuality being followed up quickly with parents. The school is aware that attendance has fallen over the past year and is taking measures to improve it.

Quality Statement 4: 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 overall, with some important features, which are well developed.

Staff members are selected on the basis of a shared vision of education and a commitment to the school's culture of developing both the students' understanding of democracy and their ability to take a lead. Many staff members in this new school have little experience or have only just begun to work in the teaching profession. The school recognizes that it therefore has to provide a significant program of professional development. This is carried out through individual support and group planning. Some teaching is well-developed and this ensures that many students are able to make good progress through the school. Teachers share their expertise in grade meetings and this experience supports those whose expertise is less.

A few teachers use data well to plan their lessons and differentiate work for the levels of skill in their class. This was a well-developed feature of a math lesson focused on algebra, where the teacher had a range of work for the students. It was suited to those who found the concept difficult while building on the skills of students whose knowledge was already secure. This good practice could be usefully adapted to show other less experienced teachers how data could be used to differentiate instruction.

Quality Statement 5: 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 overall, with some areas of proficiency.

The school measures the progress its students make and adapts the scope and sequence or to instructional arrangements in order to support learning. The tests and assessments give comparisons of the progress of individuals and classes and the school uses these proficiently to put in intervention measures for students who need them. It also measures the effectiveness of its interventions by comparing the subsequent results.

However, while there is a common commitment to high expectations there is not a common understanding of what would demonstrate the achievement of well-developed academic outcomes. For example, the school does not plan in sufficient detail to show how it will develop, or the measures that will be taken to achieve its intentions. There are few success criteria to show how well the school is achieving its stated goals and therefore, at present, it is difficult for the school to measure its progress in a way which could be used for formative planning and for evaluating the effect of the measures implemented.

School for Democracy and Leadership

600 Kingston Avenue

**Brooklyn, New York
NY 11203**

Principal: Ms Nancy Gannon

Dates of Review: 26 – 28 April 2006

**Reviewer: Pat Cox
Cambridge Education**

PART 4: EVALUATION CRITERIA GRADE SUMMARY

PART 4: EVALUATION CRITERIA GRADE SUMMARY

Final Evaluation	0	✓	+
Overall Quality of the school		✓	

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.	0	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are: (1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, math, and other important academic subjects. Criteria for measuring student progress are "objective" when they are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards-based, • consistent across students, • capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice, and when they allow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the performance of different students to be compared, and • learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified. 		X	
1.2 The school makes effective use of the data to assess the performance and progress of students by racial and ethnic groups, English Language Learners and special education students, and all other categories of interest to the school. {This criterion and the next are partially aspirational as of now. City and State Report Cards and Division of Accountability and Assessment reports provide only some of the necessary data. The NYC DOE will soon provide schools with fuller access to better data.}		X	
1.3 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, racial and ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	

Quality Statement 2: 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.	0	✓	+
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 it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.	X	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 warranting attention.		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. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. That information is central to setting reasonably 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	

Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	o	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals.		X	
3.2 Decisions about the use of teacher and student time are based on the organization of the day and week needed to inform teachers about each student's performance and next learning steps, set goals and plans for improved student learning, and implement and continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals.		X	
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.5 Teachers are accountable for student outcomes. 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	
3.6 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	
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.9 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	0	✓	+
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 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 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including, when possible, by comparing outcomes across classrooms and schools. The school monitors its performance and tackles weaknesses. Even in areas where the school is successful, leadership is not complacent, but aims to improve further. The goal in all cases is to improve student and school performance and progress.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.		X	
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.	X	X	
Quality Statement 5: 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.	o	✓	+
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 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	X	
5.3 Information generated by interim 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	X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.	X		