

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice

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Principal: Mr Hector Calderon

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

This is a very small school with 151 students from 9th to 12th grade with small class sizes of on average 21 students. It was opened in 1993, growing out of a community based organization and as a response to community issues. Its founding philosophy is the promotion of peace and justice. The school is funded by the city but raises significant additional funds to support its programs. Most students are of Hispanic ethnic background and come from families in the immediate or neighboring localities. The proportion of English language learners, at 22 per cent, is higher than the city average. There is a higher proportion of girls than boys in the school. Standards on entry to the 9th grade are generally below the average for their age. The school is exempted from some of the city tests.

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Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The leadership has high expectations of the quality of teaching and the students' academic performance, and all in the school are strongly committed to its aims and work hard for its success.
- The leadership has well-developed systems for self-evaluation in many areas, so that it is well-informed about what it needs to do to improve.
- Leadership is well-developed at all levels. Everyone in the school takes on their responsibilities purposefully and carries out their duties with enthusiasm.
- Teachers develop the students' skills and knowledge well, and involve them closely in the frequent and consistent methods for checking on their progress and setting goals for them to improve, so that graduation rates are high.
- The work of the school is closely aligned to its foundation as a community-based organization, reflecting the goals and aspirations of that community. There are many opportunities for students to take positive action in the immediate and wider community.
- The school develops its students well as confident, resourceful, independent learners, who are well-rounded and thoughtful individuals. They make well-informed choices for themselves and reflecting on their own progress.
- Students enjoy school and relationships between them and with staff are respectful and courteous; students respond well to the high levels of trust placed in them.
- The curriculum is innovative and stimulating, developing the students' abilities well through a range of interesting and challenging projects.
- There are well-developed systems for selecting staff who are committed to the school's aims and ethos and for developing their expertise.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that the flow of lessons is maintained so that the students always make the best possible progress.
- Develop the existing support and intervention systems to promote the progress of those students with learning difficulties, particularly in 11th grade.
- Further develop the school's efficient system for collecting and using data about students' performance, in order to provide more accessible and detailed information about individual strengths and weaknesses.
- Review the planning of the curriculum to ensure that it is completely aligned between and through the grades.
- Build on the school's success in promoting self-confident individuals in order to improve the way in which it develops the students' belief in their ability to succeed.
- Continue to work with teachers to develop their confidence in using data to respond to the students' needs.

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Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school, which uses data well to plan its programs and assess the progress the students are making.

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 overall well-developed.

Detailed data is gathered regularly in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science and social studies. It is collected over three, six and nine week cycles in order to measure the progress individual students and groups are making. The school uses this information to compare the performance of the different groups, by gender, racial group, and those who need special education. There is a particular and suitable emphasis on the high proportion of English language learners and ensuring that they acquire fluency. Students are involved well in these assessments, often sharing assessment rubrics, for example about the level they have reached in math, so that they can compare their progress with the assessments made by their teachers. The school uses a range of methods for assessment. The New York City data about the test results provides a starting point but the school often uses projects and portfolios to give a rounded view of standards in many subjects. For example, a group of students gave a presentation at a forum at the University of Boston, attended by students from schools all over the country. They were well-informed about their subject, the issues faced by Thailand.

Because its curricula are firmly rooted in the community, the school has well-developed systems for making an impact in that community and using these to assess progress. Strategies involve students in researching issues thoroughly, for example the rates of interest charged by banks in different parts of the city. There are rigorous methods for assessing the quality of portfolios, with students presenting their work to a panel and answering searching questions about it. The school has its own grade mastery targets that show what proficiency in each subject should be at each stage of the students' work. There are well-developed performance indicators for the portfolios that at least match the City graduation standards. However, while all the necessary information is available, it is not in the most efficient form.

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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 well-developed.

Overall, the school uses data well, although there is some variation of practice. Goals are set in conference with students so that they know what they are expected to achieve at the end of the year. Courses are planned carefully to meet these and teachers monitor the progress that students make. Students have individual ongoing feedback about their progress and are given guidance on how they can make better progress if they are falling behind. Consequently, they are knowledgeable about their standards and talk articulately and confidently about the quality of their work. Parents are consulted and informed well about the work of the school and are given guidance about how they can support their children's work at home. They have many opportunities to take courses in the school.

There are well-developed procedures for supporting those who are in danger of failing to meet targets. The system of mentors ensures that each student has an adult who keeps careful watch on their academic and personal progress. This is a key element in identifying problems and putting in support. Special education resources are used to support students in class or to work in small groups or individually. There are additional classes after school and on Saturdays, which many students attend, and summer schools focus on those subjects and areas where students need to make up lost ground. These strategies are mainly successful, so that the pass rates are high. Through its assessment procedures, the school is aware that further work needs to be done to accelerate the learning of the 11th grade students who require special education support.

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 well-developed overall.

The curricula are developed to match the mastery targets so that there is a clear path of progress for students. In addition, there is a range of choices and projects that are designed to ensure that the students are involved in, and make a contribution to, the community. There are programs that align with the school's culture of concern for peace and justice. For example, students study the proposed changes to the status of Puerto Rico and the arguments raised by the war in Iraq. The staff make the best use possible of the limited accommodation, such as the lack of laboratories, by imaginative approaches to subjects such as chemistry. The integrated humanities curriculum in the 9th and 10th Grades is innovative and involves artwork at a high level.

The school raises considerable additional funding to keep classes small, in order to maximize the time teachers can spend with individual students. Instruction takes place in the evening in order for students to catch up on work and to take extra classes such as dance and drumming. Part of the funding is used for educational visits that expand the students' experience of the world. However, while the school is working to ensure that the curriculum is completely aligned between subjects and Grades in order to build smoothly on the students' skills, this process is not yet complete.

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The school sets high expectations for the quality of instruction and the standards the students reach. The principal and senior staff observe classroom teaching frequently and give teachers detailed information about their performance. Any points for improvement are followed up in further observations. Teachers observe each others' lessons in order to improve their own practice. The test data is analyzed to show which classes are most successful and senior staff hold discussions with individual teachers to investigate the performance of different groups and individuals. Targets are set for improvement.

Teachers act as mentors to groups of students, monitoring their performance and organizing support for them. These relationships are strong and ensure that the students have all their needs monitored and supported. The school is well aware of the emotional and personal issues that students have and there are strong systems to engage them. They say that all staff are supportive and helpful and there is always an adult they can confide in. The school places considerable trust in the students and they respond well, taking responsibility for their own behavior. Because there is high quality instruction and challenging and stimulating curricula, the students stay motivated and involved in their work and develop their independence well. However, there are occasions when the work given to students does not move their learning on as rapidly as it could.

Many students enter the school having previously experienced academic failure. The school is aware that it needs to continue to develop their belief that they can succeed. Attendance is given high priority and the school takes immediate and appropriate action to follow up absence and lateness. There is detailed data about the academic and personal progress of all students but this information is not held in compatible forms, so that the school finds it difficult to align 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 well-developed overall.

There are well-designed methods for selecting staff who are in sympathy with the school's culture and philosophy. The selection procedures are rigorous, with demanding questions requiring commitment to a breadth of vision about education. The staff work closely as a team to develop their teaching strategies in line with this commitment. Many came to the school unqualified and developed their qualifications while working there. The leadership has a good understanding of the areas where improvement is needed and uses a well-developed range of strategies to improve instructional techniques. Many staff have a keen grasp of the data the school uses and use this to adapt their instruction so that there are no gaps in the students' learning. However, there is some inconsistency; while most are confident others are still developing their expertise.

The leadership of the school is well-developed throughout, so that all understand their roles in its development and take their responsibilities seriously and enthusiastically. Because there is frequent monitoring of performance, the school reacts rapidly to any drop in achievement and plans well for improvement. The gap in standards between the boys and girls is being tackled in many ways, for example employing more male facilitators to give good role models. Those who are meeting the standards early are

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identified quickly and further courses designed to challenge them. Some attend courses at the local college.

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 well-developed.

The leadership of the school is well-developed and firmly focused on high standards. The school's plans are carefully designed to ensure that students reach the goals that have been set. Progress is measured regularly and plans are revised when it is evident that improvement is needed. The portfolios and assessment procedures are so demanding that students sometimes fail to reach the mastery targets but pass the regents tests and/or meet the state standards. The test and ongoing assessment data, along with the regular monitoring of instruction, informs the school of the success of its plans. Scope and sequence are changed if it is evident that there are areas that need improvement. Therefore, when it was apparent that there was an increasing failure rate in one class, there was immediate intervention to change instruction techniques and the curriculum. Assessments showed a significant and rapid rise in standards.

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Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

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.	o	✓	+
<p>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:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, math, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are “objective” when they are</p> <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, <p>and when they allow</p> <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
<p>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.</p> <p>{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.}</p>			X
<p>1.1 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.</p>		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.	o	✓	+
<p>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.</p>			X
<p>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.</p>		X	
<p>2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.</p>		X	
<p>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.</p>			X
<p>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</p>			X

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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	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	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	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

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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
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
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