



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Alexander Humboldt School

Public School 115

586 West 177 Street

New York

NY 10033

Principal: Sara Carvajal

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Reviewer: Andy McClean

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Alexander Humboldt School is located in Washington Heights and serves students from kindergarten through 6th grade. There are 950 students, with a high proportion (48%) being English language learners. Spanish and English are the main languages spoken in school. Ninety-six percent of students are from a Hispanic background, with 2% Black, 1% White and 1% Asian and other students. The school has several bilingual services, one of which is the Dual Language Program where select classes in grades kindergarten through 2 are taught in Spanish and English on alternate days.

More than 96% of the students have Title I eligibility, a much higher proportion than in City schools and higher than found in similar schools. Around 10% of those enrolled are special education students, which is about the same as similar and City schools. Average daily attendance is 94%, which is above the City average and also above that of similar schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- A very positive and reflective principal communicates a shared vision of success to all and a belief in the school's capacity to improve.
- A culture of effective teams has been created where all contribute to the primary goal of raising student achievement.
- Celebration of all languages and cultures has resulted in every student being included, with language differences not being used as an excuse for lack of progress.
- The detailed planning concentrates on improving the reading for all English language learners as a means of supporting learning across the curriculum.
- The administration makes sure that professional development takes full account of school goals and teachers' identified needs.
- Well-established dialogue between all members of the school community and the administration results in every teacher, parent and staff member being valued.
- There is a willingness and determination to share the best teaching and learning experiences among colleagues within an atmosphere of mutual support.
- Students' work is presented well in the bright colorful school building and both enhance students' self-esteem.
- The school cabinet gives challenge and support, which demonstrates its professionalism and dedication to moving the school forward.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish procedures to enable the administration and staff to monitor and evaluate the impact of new initiatives on student achievement.
- Increase parental involvement in their children's education by further developing ways to reach out to those parents who currently do not participate in school activities.
- Research and implement further uses of technology as a tool to support independent learning for all students.
- Use all available data to help determine teachers' priorities for improvement, particularly in planning for and assessing students' progress.
- Further develop systems for giving students objective feedback to help them know what they need to do to improve.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with some well-developed features.

This is a school which has moved forward very effectively in the last three years and is beginning to succeed. The principal, who has just started her third year, has a leadership style that motivates all teachers and enthuses students with a great desire to learn. Celebration of the students' cultures and languages is used effectively to provide them with a very supportive and inclusive learning environment. The school has good links with parents and the local community. The faculty reflects the diverse background of the community, understands students' challenges and does its utmost to provide all students with the best education possible. The school cabinet provides the principal with objective support and challenge, which is resulting in changes that are raising achievement, particularly for those students who are English language learners.

School leaders evaluate the impact of most initiatives in a focused way. This has not been possible with the most recent ones as all are not yet fully implemented. The school is aware of the need to find other ways of making contact with parents who currently do not participate in their children's education. The use of technology to assist students in their independent learning is currently limited within the curriculum. However, it is beginning to develop across content areas.

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 with some well-developed features.

The principal and cabinet gather and analyze in depth test data throughout the school year. They use this analysis to compare how well the school is doing compared to other schools in the area and City. The conclusions drawn from it are communicated to teachers so they have a clear understanding of each student's performance, and also how well their class and grade are doing in comparison with others. Such data analysis in depth is relatively new in school. However, with the inspirational guidance of the principal, all teachers have enthusiastically accepted these systems and understand how data can be used to accelerate students' progress.

The school tracks progress well, enabling staff to make very good use of data to support those students who need the most help to learn. However, systems are new. A recently organized system identifies those students who have made good or better progress, those who are in need of greater help from their class teachers and those who have made little or no progress. All students are then given a color-coding and teachers can see immediately who to target with extra language support and by which teachers in specific grades or classes. A major lesson learned has been the identification of inconsistencies in results within grades and across similar classes and the need for all staff to share best practice in using data to determine future teaching.

Data is used effectively to support the school's major goal to achieve language proficiency for all its English language learners. This enables all teachers and administrators to

address student underachievement as part of a constantly changing program of support. This has resulted in students at an early stage of learning English making significant progress in a short time. Teachers are able to see from their regular formative assessments what instruction is working and where pull-out or push-in programs are necessary.

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 with some well developed features.

The principal and cabinet have set in motion effective systems for using data to set goals for student achievement. The principal has communicated to all staff what the year’s priorities will be, deduced from test results, formative assessment, and anecdotal evidence. Systems support teachers in identifying and setting goals for particular groups or subjects in greatest need of improvement and intervention. These included detailed plans which led to an improvement in mathematics achievement at all levels across grades 3 through 6 last year.

In order to help the school reach its goal for a high proportion of English language learners to achieve proficiency in City tests this year, the school has implemented a new language policy that focuses on allocating time for students to learn English. A very thorough dual language program is addressing the needs of students to enable them to access the whole school curriculum.

The school and teachers make every effort to communicate their high expectations to students and parents. At present the school is seeking to make greater use of its regular ongoing assessments to give feedback to students and parents on how they have progressed and what their next steps will be. Parents and caregivers are regularly invited into school to discuss their children’s progress and learn how they can support the school’s goals, such as attending ‘Coffee with the principal’, organized by the parent coordinator. At such a meeting, conducted wholly in Spanish and so enthusiastically received, the principal is able to impress upon those present the need for students’ regular attendance, particularly on test days.

The school tries very hard to reach all parents and caregivers. At present there is a realization that more needs to be done to reach out to those who are not involved in their children’s learning so that the school can show them how to help their children achieve.

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

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

In response to outcomes revealed by a close analysis of test data, teachers have been given clear guidelines on how to teach the mandated curriculum. Running records of students’ performance are now in place and the results of regular tests are used to determine how lessons are planned and taught. Curriculum maps exist for English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. These have been developed

through regular consultation with staff and are an aspect of daily instruction that all teachers own and for which they are accountable.

From analysis of student data, the school is driving forward relentlessly to ensure that all English language learners receive proper and focused instruction, either in dual or single language classes. At present what is missing from instruction is greater differentiation for higher achievers so that they are challenged to make faster progress. To try to raise achievement in reading and writing, teachers use their assessment records well to target learning in reading and writing workshops. While the use of technology has increased, students' use of computers to develop their ability to be independent learners is only seen in some classes.

Teachers meet frequently to discuss successful practice and what needs to be developed further. What is very evident is an acceptance throughout the school that the evaluation of instructional practices is something to be improved. Professional development courses and guidance by specific coaches are already in place. The school understands that such evaluative practices have begun to make an impact but need to become even more widespread. For example, grade meetings give suitable opportunities to plan work together to try and ensure achievement becomes more even across subjects, classes and grades. Resources and teachers have been reallocated, and instructional time rescheduled, to ensure the right programs of study address the school's key goals of improving students' language skills and, in particular, their reading levels.

Students enjoy their work. Teachers try to make lessons practical, such as planning science investigations, and the enthusiasm of many teachers inspires students to make greater efforts to succeed. Programs outside school hours, such as the Bell Program, continue to give all students with opportunities to succeed.

Students' higher attendance than City and similar school averages is a direct result of the school's climate for learning. All absences are followed up rigorously and parents are encouraged to send their children to school every day and on time.

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 with some well-developed features.

The energetic leadership of the principal, ably assisted by a dedicated cabinet, has resulted in the selection and development of a staff which is focused on raising student achievement. All teachers have ample opportunity to ask for help and there is a very strong support network in school to assist teachers in understanding new programs and teaching techniques. The newest members of staff are very positive about the welcome they receive from colleagues and the many opportunities for inter-visitations and conferences.

Individual interviews are held with staff where the principal discusses professional development needs as well as sharing the school's goals and action plans to achieve them. In addition, professional development needs that derive from an analysis of data are identified in action plans. The principal has recently helped all staff understand how to use school-wide data to support specific instructional programs. All staff shares the principal's vision that the way forward to raise students' achievement is through greater proficiency

with reading. To this end, the school has concentrated its professional development activities to ensure that teachers can accurately assess their students' reading levels.

The administrative cabinet regularly carries out formal lesson observations, which is ensuring agreed practices are consistently implemented. A system is not yet in place where the outcomes of all observations, both formal and informal, are fully evaluated and acted upon.

Teachers express a deep respect and faith in the principal's capacity to make further positive changes in school. They are very secure in the knowledge that she is approachable and open to discussion about aspects of school life that affects them. This leads to the school running very smoothly towards achieving clear goals and targets.

Support services are fully integrated into the positive school culture of ensuring that all students receive a high-quality education. These support teams and staff have a very clear understanding of the school's overall aims and goals. They are regularly consulted about what interventions have succeeded and what areas still need to be addressed. Support of outside bodies from the local community is well integrated into helping students improve their standards.

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 a well-crafted Comprehensive Education Plan, alongside the principal's own outline plans for developing specific priority areas. Action plans for particular subjects and a plan for ensuring better language development for English language learners have clearly set-out goals measured by student performance. All plans have been implemented and enthusiastically adopted by teachers, with students benefiting from the much sharper focus upon specific language skills. While the school monitors progress closely, it does not yet use this as a measure to review plans systematically and evaluate whether the school is on track to reach its goals. This is because systems are new. In most cases, there has not been enough time or statistical data to come to such conclusions. Furthermore, school leaders realize that teachers' skills are still not sharp enough in regularly using formative assessment to measure students' progress in terms of what they have learned from individual classes or programs. Systems are now started that enable each year's evaluation and review to inform the following year's goals setting process.

Stemming from the clear and purposeful leadership of the principal, a climate of honest self-evaluation leads to detailed plans of how to tackle the major challenges facing the school. These have included successful improvement of students' reading abilities and skills and ensuring that all English language learners have the same opportunities to succeed as all others.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Alexander Humboldt School (PS 115)	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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	