



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Jacob A Riis Community School

Public/Intermediate School 126

**80 Catherine Street
New York
NY 10038**

Principal: Kerry Decker

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Reviewer: Ted Solow

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 126, Manhattan Academy of Technology, is a pre-kindergarten through grade 8 school with 699 students. It is located on the periphery of Chinatown, near the East River and both the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges.

This culturally diverse school is composed of 39.4% Asian, 33.6% Hispanic, 18% Black and 9% White students. In 2005, the percentage of students who had recently arrived in the country was 4.7%, which was lower than at City and similar schools. Most of these students' countries of birth were China, Dominican Republic and Hong Kong.

The percentage of students known to be eligible for Title 1 funding is 68%.

Special education students comprise 11% of the student body and 17% of the students are English language learners. All special education students are served in collaborative team teaching classes, one at every grade level.

In 2005, the attendance rate was 93.8% which was higher than the figure for City and similar schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal promotes collaborative relationships and accountability for everyone.
- The administrative team focuses on teaching and learning within a school culture of high expectations for all students.
- The staff have formed a collaborative community that supports personal and professional growth.
- Grade teams work collaboratively to produce optimal teaching and learning conditions for the students.
- Data for English language arts and mathematics is used to address the needs and strengths of the students in each class and grade.
- The staff use the information gathered from all assessment data to address learning practices.
- The school has well defined intervention policies and practices in place for struggling students.
- Professional development is designed to have a direct impact on the progress of students and to hone the skills of the staff.
- Procedures, policies and school rules contribute to a school tone that is conducive to learning.
- The students are well behaved and focused on learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue the work to improve teachers confidence in using data to plan instruction in the upper grades.
- Further develop the use of data to plan work which more closely matches the needs of individuals and small groups.
- Develop further opportunities for staff to share knowledge, skills and experience as an alternative to a formal observation for tenured teachers.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with well-developed features.

The principal is beginning her third year at the school. She selected an early childhood specialist and a middle school specialist to be her assistant principals. This administrative team works well together, and has made a positive impact on the entire school community. Parents now want their children to attend this school. The school is well maintained and student work and testaments to their athletic accomplishments are visible throughout the building.

The staff have formed a collaborative community to support each other's personal and professional growth. Grade teams work effectively with coaches, counselors, staff developers, and other instructional support providers. Data is used by teachers to plan for classes and individual learners. The administrative team meets with each grade team to review individual and class performance on a monthly basis.

The teachers plan cooperatively, develop strategies, and deliver appropriate instruction to their students. Professional development activities are in place to address differentiated instruction and to create a seamless curriculum for grades kindergarten through grade eight.

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 uses a variety of approaches for using and analyzing data. The administrative team meets monthly with each grade team during common planning time. Data from State exams, interim assessments such as the Princeton Review in literacy and mathematics, Early Childhood Language Arts Assessment, Directed Reading Assessments and leveled books are incorporated into the discussions. Teachers and grade leaders use conferencing notes, running records, student writing samples, and class assessments as supporting evidence at these meetings. The progress of every student in the school is reviewed and appropriate decisions are made about developing students' academic needs and strengths. Much of the professional development at the school focuses on strengthening and refining these skills.

The principal and her administrative team meet weekly with the academic intervention services team to conduct case study conferences for the most at-risk students. Case conferences focus on special education students, English language learners, held-over students, and others who are struggling. Students are referred to the team by individual teachers after prescribed interventions in the classroom have taken place. These conferences use a wide range of current data, assessments and samples of student work. Parents are invited to participate at the meeting.

Annual performance data is used to analyze student, class, grade, special populations, and whole school progress from year to year. Comparisons are made with similar schools in the City. The results are analyzed, areas for improvement are identified and school-wide goals are revised. The principal and her administrative team have good plans in place to enhance their examination of data for sub-groups of interest, to extend the effective practice that is already in place.

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 well developed.

A spirit of collaboration is infused in the culture of this school. Goals are set for students and grade clusters through a defined action plan. Data from formal and informal assessments, teachers’ conferencing notes, and monthly student progress reviews, produced by the principal, are used to set objective, measurable goals for student improvement. This collaborative process enables the free flow of thoughts and ideas to formulate effective planning strategies. Teachers follow student progress through their range of data. Benchmark intervals in literacy are established to align data with teaching and learning practices. All teachers at this school have high expectation for their students, and the principal has worked to build the confidence of middle school staff in using data to realize those expectations.

Struggling students, special education students, English language learners and held-over students are given high priority for additional support in literacy, mathematics and content area subjects. Students, who are identified through a documented referral process as needing extra support services, are screened by the academic intervention team. Case studies are presented to the administrative team, pupil personnel committee, and other service providers. Plans are then formulated and appropriate interventions are put in place. Services are provided during the school day, using the push-in and pull-out model of support. Extended school day and after-school programs are also in place for students needing additional support. Parents are involved in the process before any services are instituted. At the monthly review sessions, progress is assessed in order to ascertain whether additional intervention or special education referral is needed.

Teachers communicate information regarding academic and social progress to the students and their parents. Parents also appreciate the communications they receive from the teachers and the principal regarding every aspect of school community life. Communications include newsletters, phone conversations, progress reports and the monthly calendar of events.

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.

The school is exempt from the mandated curriculum, and the Teacher’s College literacy program has been selected for all grades. The workshop model has been successfully implemented in the lower school as evidenced by the high level of student interest and

participation. The English language arts teachers at the middle school also use the balanced literacy curriculum in their classes. Reading instruction is tailored to each student's reading needs based on qualitative and quantitative data. The principal recognizes that the elementary school is more developed in the implementation of the workshop method than the middle school, and is working effectively to develop greater consistency amongst teachers and across subjects. The mathematics program has a focus on investigative work, to increase students' problem-solving skills. Science and social studies are aligned with State and City standards. Technology is the fifth core subject students pursue in the middle school. The program is supported by a state-of-the-art computer laboratory.

Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are wisely used to support student learning via supportive staffing and program planning. For example, the principal recognized the need to refine the analysis of mathematics data to improve instructional outcomes and professional development is being planned to address this need. Teachers' awareness of their accountability for improving instruction is reflected in their use of data for planning. They recognize the need to differentiate instruction in their classes, although this is not yet as consistent as the school would wish. It is used most successfully in the collaborative team teaching classes and classes through the elementary school. Good improvement has been achieved in classes in the middle school and support and advice are ongoing to improve this further. The teachers meet at the twice weekly grade meetings to address current data, develop instructional strategies, and prepare differentiated activities for use in the classroom.

The teachers are caring and respectful of their students, and in turn are trusted and respected by students. Attendance is given a high priority. Teachers and the principal review attendance data as part of the monthly meetings about each student's needs.

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 well developed.

Staff members are selected after interviews by the school leadership team, having demonstrated their classroom capabilities. They are required to demonstrate the prerequisite knowledge in a core subject area, understanding of how data drives instruction and commitment to the school's philosophy of teamwork and collaboration. Selections for support staff and administrators are determined by the needs of the students.

Professional development activities are designed to meet the needs of the school. Teachers' College staff developers provide school-wide support in the classrooms, at weekly grade conferences and during selected professional development days. There is an internal sharing of good best practice among the staff. A schedule of inter-class and inter-school visits for staff members allows them to observe good practice. Teachers are offered opportunities to attend City and regional workshops and share new information with their colleagues. Contributors to the school-wide professional development program are teachers, counselors, related services providers and members of the administrative team.

Two to three times a week the administrative team visits every class. Through a process of informal and formal observations, teachers are provided with immediate feedback after

the visit. While the school is a collaborative community, it does not currently take opportunities to provide times when the most experienced teachers can specifically share knowledge, skills and experience as an alternative to formal observation for those who are tenured. Additional support is offered to staff who have not mastered a particular skill, such as in the continuing support that is given to staff in the older grades to increase their confidence in using data in planning an appropriate range of activities.

Students and parents appreciate the principal's efforts to support the stable environment at the school. She is well respected and has the capacity to effect further change. A calm and orderly environment is evident throughout the school. It runs well on a day-to-day basis, communication is clear and procedures are followed. Students and parents talk of the many positive changes the school has made during the past six years and continuous improvement is given a high value. Collaboration with external partnerships brings many resources to the school. The Immigrant Social Services group and the Chinatown Young Men's Christian Association provide after-school academic enrichment, homework help and recreational activities. The relationship with the National Dance Institute supports the school's exemplary arts program. Their work with fourth and fifth graders culminates with a year-end performance for the school community.

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 well developed.

Through effective monitoring of student progress, evaluation of curriculum, revision of interim goals, and staff development activities the school is kept well aware and updated about the specific measures of its effectiveness.

The principal and her administrative team use the Comprehensive Education Plan as a tool to reflect the information gleaned from available data to analyze performance, revise current goals and set future goals. Monthly meetings are held with every teacher to review student progress. Individual data for every student in every class is posted on a tracking sheet in the principal's office. The academic intervention services team meets with the principal every two weeks to monitor progress of students who are receiving intervention services. Student plans are reviewed and revised as necessary. The principal also tracks at-risk and struggling students. Careful attention is paid to students who were held over and those who are in danger of being held over. The same monitoring process takes place for English language learners. Because of this monitoring process, the need for interventions and other support can be quickly identified and strategies implemented. Immediate services can take place as a result of the extensive monitoring process. Its impact is seen through the continual progress and growth of student learning outcomes.

The principal analyzes data from each student, class, grade and cohort during her monthly review process with the staff, and changes to plans and interventions are made as a result. This data analysis, for example, revealed a drop in reading scores as students moved into the middle school. To address this problem, the English language arts teachers in the middle school now use the same procedures as the lower grade teachers.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Jacob A Riis School (PS/IS 126)	∅	✓	+
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 inspirational 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