



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Family Academy

Public School / Middle School 241

**240 West 113 Street
Manhattan
NY 10026**

Principal: Diana Diaz

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Reviewer: Pamela Taylor

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Family Academy is a combined elementary and middle school, with 421 students enrolled, from pre-kindergarten to grade 8. Of these, 48 (11.4%) are special education students and 65 (15.4%) are English language learners. The school is Title 1 funded from 2007. Attendance rates are around 93%, compared with a City average of 94%. It is located in Harlem, where it shares a site and building with one other school. The ethnic composition of the school is mostly Black students (80%), with a substantial number of Hispanic students (15%) and very small numbers of students in other ethnic groupings. The main languages spoken are English, Spanish and French. The principal is in her third year in post, having started at the school in September 2004.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- This is an improving school which has made considerable strides from a period of instability and difficulty before the arrival of the present principal.
- The strong and committed principal leads by example and is seen by students and parents as someone who cares deeply about the education, progress and welfare of the students.
- The collection of data by the principal and assistant principals is thorough and well-recorded.
- The administrative cabinet has high expectations and has set clear goals for classes and individual students, in the light of careful analysis of data.
- The committed and caring teachers have made considerable efforts to strengthen instructional methods to focus more sharply on differentiation and collaborative working by students.
- The full program of lesson observations by the cabinet has improved practice and increased accountability.
- Monitoring and revising are becoming more firmly embedded in the way staff reflect on their work and students' performance.
- The school environment is warm, secure and inviting, with good use made of bulletin boards for the display of students' work.
- The school's initiative, within English language arts, in piloting mentoring systems by 8th grade students for 4th grade students has been introduced with sensitivity.
- A strong emphasis by the principal in establishing clarity of working methods and discipline has brought order and a firm structure to the working day.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue with the program of professional development for teachers on how to use the analysis of data for everyday practice, to encourage familiarity with the required methods.
- Although the systems are in place, ensure that the analysis of data is used by all staff as fully as possible to inform the setting of goals.
- Continue to work on the improvement of results especially in English language arts and mathematics.
- Build in greater use of differentiation to ensure that all students are challenged by appropriate levels of work.
- Secure consistency in the quality of students' portfolios, especially those used in decisions about promotion and holdover.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

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

All those connected with the Family Academy agree that it previously had considerable problems. It is therefore greatly to the credit of the principal and her staff that it is now in good shape, with a number of clear strengths and many signs of progress. Although there are still occasional signs that some students' behavior needs attention, the enthusiastic commitment of the current staff has already led to substantial gains in attitudes and motivation. The school has done especially well to remedy a lack of adequate data collection, by putting in place efficient recording and analysis systems which give teachers the facility to use detailed information as the springboard for effective planning for meeting students' needs. It sees clearly how this link between data and instruction is the key to raising achievement levels.

Despite these obvious signs of decisive intervention and active management of the school's organization, there are still some matters where current practice shows the scope for further improvement. These relate both to the importance of ensuring the greatest possible consistency in practice and to using data in ways which actually lead to improved student performance. The school has reason to feel encouraged by the fact that its strenuous efforts are clearly visible in improved performance in many aspects of its work. It has the leadership capacity to take it on to the next step.

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 collection of data by the principal and assistant principals is thorough and well-recorded. There is a review of students and classes based on strengths and weaknesses, as underscored by test results, teachers' informal assessments and observation. Faculty members discuss the data in common preparation periods. The school has begun to analyze the performance of different ethnic and other groups, although this is an area which is still developing.

In reviewing children's progress, the school's focus has been particularly on groups, including ethnic groups, English language learners and special education students, where it is felt there is the possibility of improving the performance by one level by targeted intervention. The school undertakes comparative use of data, reviewing its previous performance and studying that of other schools, in order to see how it is doing with its students. There is not yet full consistency in the quality of students' portfolios, especially those used in decisions about promotion and holdover, and more could be done to discuss this area of the school's work.

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 well-developed features.

The administrative cabinet has high expectations and has set clear goals for classes and individual students, in the light of careful analysis of data. These goals are closely linked to the school's mission statement 'to produce lifelong learners' and are based on the understanding that all students can learn if they are given the opportunity. This means that the school has high expectations for students and staff. Although the systems are in place, more could be done to ensure that the analysis of data is used as fully as possible to inform the setting of goals. The school sees a need in the elementary school to continue to give priority to moving children from levels 1 and 2 in reading and mathematics, and increasing students' achievement at level 3 in both areas of the curriculum. It therefore fully accepts the importance of continuing to work on the improvement of results, especially in English language arts and mathematics, and sees the need for further professional development to support this goal, in order to improve the quality of instruction.

The school is targeting a number of students particularly in the middle school. These include those working at level 2, as well as high-performing students at levels 3 and 4. This constitutes a large proportion of the population, since there are very few level 1 students. The school has placed a firm emphasis on raising expectations, both of academic performance and behavior. This is a particular focus within pull-out groups, for example. The communications with students and parents or caregivers are focused on helping to ensure that they understand what progress is being made and what is needed to improve performance further. The school seeks to keep parents fully involved in its work through such activities as the Parent Teacher Association. Despite a number of initiatives parental involvement remains low. However, elementary school parents supported the parent teacher conference well. The Family Dinner has been particularly successful as a social activity.

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 follows the mandated curriculum closely and seeks to ensure that the programs and teaching courses followed are well-aligned to students' needs. The committed and caring teachers have made considerable efforts to strengthen instructional methods to focus more sharply on differentiation and collaborative working by students. Teaching quality benefits from clearly-planned and well-structured lessons, to which students respond positively and collaboratively. Effective use is made of the 'mini-lesson' format to keep the pace moving and the activity varied. Teachers are held accountable for their achievements. They are positive about the changes made under the tenure of the present principal, seeing the results of her policies in vastly improved academic performance and student behavior. In recent times, the principal has been encouraging staff to build in greater use of differentiation to ensure that all students are challenged by appropriate levels of work

The principal inherited a large budgetary deficit and has worked hard to get the school's finances back on track. The administration has been able to attract grants from external

sources, and these have helped appreciably. The school has benefited from additional support from the region in literacy and mathematics. It also uses data effectively to determine staffing needs and the deployment of teachers to particular classes.

The school environment is warm, secure and inviting, with good use made of bulletin boards for the display of students' work. The school's initiative, within English language arts, in piloting mentoring systems by 8th grade students for 4th grade students has been introduced with sensitivity. There is a strong focus in the school on ensuring that personal as well as academic needs are met. This is seen, for example in meetings of the pupil personnel committee and academic intervention services staff.

Attendance has been a major priority of the principal and there has been a significant improvement, so that it is currently 93%. The principal recognizes this as a sign of the students' greater involvement in their own academic progress and their eagerness to participate in programs offered by the school. The figures are monitored daily, with print-outs showing all absent students, and there are incentives for the class with the best attendance record. Attendance by both staff has also improved.

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.

An urgent priority for the principal has been to have a full staff of suitable teachers, and much effort has been devoted to this aim. Parents notice the effect of this, referring to the good working relationship teachers have with their students. Professional development is handled by the principal and the two assistant principals, together with the literacy and mathematics coaches. This has focused appropriately on data collection and needs analysis. The philosophy is to turnkey the lessons learnt from attending professional development sessions, so that they are available to staff more widely. The program has been beneficial, but the school recognizes the need to continue with focusing on how to use the analysis of data for everyday practice, to encourage familiarity with the required methods.

The full program of lesson observations by the cabinet has improved practice and increased accountability. Teachers appreciate the specific feedback received after classroom visits. In addition teachers visit each other's classes where possible, as well as other schools, as part of the commitment to professional development. The school is developing some strong use of teams to support its goals. The coaches for literacy and mathematics have been strongly instrumental in this and have a close involvement in monitoring students' progress. The principal is seen by students, staff and parents as someone who cares deeply about the education, progress and welfare of the students: a 'children-first' person, in the words of one member of staff. Her strong style of leadership means that she is not afraid to take on challenges if she believes that doing so will lead to improved outcomes for her students. The changes which she has driven are ones which are warmly welcomed and are establishing the school's increasing success.

A strong emphasis by the principal on establishing clarity of working methods, rules and discipline has brought order and a firm structure to the working day and to the school climate. The environment is seen to have improved, with the buildings now well cared for and attractive displays of students' work. The school has a monthly news bulletin with a 'principal's message' and places a strong emphasis on establishing good communications

with parents, although the response is often disappointingly low. There are good links with a number of external partners, including Beacon Program, Truce Program and Friends of the School. These organizations provide recreational and academic programs after school hours. Counselors from these organizations regularly discuss students' progress and attendance with the school, and meet with the administration to monitor students' goals.

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.

Monitoring and revising are now more firmly embedded in the way staff reflect on their work and students' performance. There is useful work based on interim assessments and teachers' assessments in conjunction with published data, which allows the school to make more subtle diagnoses of how to support students and raise the level of their performance.

Under the leadership of the principal and the assistant principals, the school is acquiring the ability to reflect and take stock of the success of its plans, and to undertake revisions accordingly. It uses planning and review cycles to ensure that any potential problem is not left too long. The performance of teachers in most need of support is monitored, in case there is a requirement for an instant change in assignment, for example.

The school's leadership is showing a welcome flexibility of response to what is asked of it. It has successfully implemented many successful changes that have set the climate for learning as a positive one. Consequently, it is now well placed to go one step further in its analysis and interpretation of data, by empowering all teachers to develop the most effective strategies to bring continued improvement to student outcomes by providing individual goals and keeping these under review. The determination of the cabinet to tackle challenges and work only for the students' good is not in doubt. It is this strength of will that is already making it a proficient school, with the promise of further success to come.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Family Academy (PS/MS 241)	∅	✓	+
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	