



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**The Renaissance Military and Leadership
Academy**

**Intermediate School 286
509 West 129th Street
New York
NY 10039**

Principal: Sandra Small

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Reviewer: Clive Parsons**

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Renaissance Military and Leadership Academy is a middle school with students in grades 6 through 8. It is located in Harlem. There are just over 250 students enrolled, mostly in grades 7 and 8. The school follows a military protocol. Approximately two thirds of the student body is Black and one third is Hispanic. There are small proportions of students from other ethnic backgrounds. Very few students are recent arrivals in the United States. Those that are have arrived from Ecuador. Student mobility is about the same as other schools. There is a higher proportion of special education students than in other schools, although a smaller proportion of students are English language learners. The school receives Title I funding. A relatively high proportion of students have been suspended so far this academic year. Student attendance is very much higher than in most similar schools.

Historically, the school has functioned with a relatively inexperienced staff. Less than one third of teachers had more than two years experience in the school last academic year, for example. This year is the first time that the school has had all of its teachers certified in their subject area, at least for part of the year.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has the respect of the community, who judge that this school is improving.
- Academic intervention is targeted effectively through the use of data and diagnostic evaluations.
- There is some effective instruction, where data is used well to differentiate the support and challenge provided to students.
- Coaches are working well to match the curriculum to the needs of the student body.
- The school is successful in enabling many students to take responsibility for their own learning, as well as their academic and personal growth.
- Some effective strategies and activities are enabling students to raise their aspirations and personal goals.
- Many students take advantage of the enrichment and additional academic opportunities offered.
- Attendance is high.
- Coaches are working well to improve the quality and impact of instruction through support and professional development for teachers.
- Collaborative activity is ensuring that teachers' assessments are increasingly consistent and accurate.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that the data collected is used to build a continuously updated picture of the overall performance of each cohort and of identified groups within it.
- Ensure that the goals established for immediate and long-term improvement are demanding, achievable and objectively measurable, with specific plans and timeframes for reaching them.
- Ensure that the curriculum is matched fully to meeting the students' needs, provides them with access at the appropriate level and enables them to make rapid progress.
- Ensure that the climate and culture of the school requires all students to engage consistently in learning and in developing responsibility for their own learning.
- Ensure that routines and expectations are enforced fully, so that lessons start promptly, continue for the full allotted time and include all students who are in school.
- Ensure that the information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach the goals established.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school, with some proficient areas.

The Renaissance Military and Leadership Academy faces considerable challenges and successfully overcomes many of them. Parents and students talk positively about the opportunities the school offers. Some students describe the school as transforming their lives and providing them with a much brighter and positive future. Many students are attracted by and respond well to the expectations of self discipline and of taking personal responsibility for their own actions. They enjoy the leadership training and other opportunities afforded them by the school. A minority of students engage less well.

Data is starting to drive aspects of the school's work. Some analysis and evaluation is not yet sharp and rigorous enough to guarantee the rate of the students' progress that the school is striving for. In addition, some more recent actions and strategies have not yet had the time to demonstrate a guaranteed impact on the academic outcomes for students. Teachers are recognizing positive developments however, with students demonstrating a more secure use of knowledge and skills in class. At present, the relative inexperience in the school of a number of teachers means that strategies are not yet fully established or implemented consistently.

The issues arising from this review point the school to using the data that it collects in a more targeted manner to really understand the reasons for the students' academic success or slower than expected progress. In addition, it recognizes the need for greater consistency from staff and students alike in achieving the school's aspirations for them.

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 undeveloped, with some proficient aspects.

The school generates an appropriate range of data that enables teachers to build an updated picture of student performance in their content area. Suitable strategies are in place to ensure that these evaluations are reliable and consistent. There is a balance of standardized tests and teacher-generated assessments. The school's coaches and the principal are instrumental in ensuring that the expectations within the assessments are consistent. Collaborative discussion among teachers, sometimes focused around the students' work, is also helping to ensure greater consistency. Diagnostic tests are used to identify specific performance gaps for individual students, as well as to look at the strengths and weaknesses for a class or cohort as a whole. This information is then used to target individual, small-group or whole-class interventions. This work is starting to have an impact, especially where staffing has been more stable, such as in English language arts.

The data is not consistently drawn together to provide a continuously updated picture of the performance of the cohort as a whole, however. The monitoring and tracking of the performance and progress of students and key groups within the cohort tends to lack focus as a result. Consequently the comparison of performance across classes, groups of students and academic subject areas is not sufficiently rigorous and timely. The identification of performance gaps and the explanations for them is then not sufficiently sharp to enable the school to act decisively on the outcomes. The school does not need to collect more data for the time being. The data already collected needs to be used more effectively to focus and direct its work more consistently.

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 undeveloped.

Students are directed towards achieving, or surpassing, the expected level in City and State tests. The Comprehensive Education Plan also contains some quantitative goals, such as a 5 percent increase in achievement in State and City tests over the year ahead. However, these goals are not based upon a rigorous evaluation of the data available. Cohort data, from State and City tests and from continuously updated monitoring of student progress, is not evaluated consistently to identify key groups of students who would benefit from specific goals being established for them.

Short-term goals to eliminate weaknesses are established for individuals and small groups of students following diagnostic testing. This is done well in English language arts, for example. Academic intervention is targeted well through the effective use of data and diagnostic evaluations, again with short-term goals established to eliminate key weaknesses. Some lessons also have immediate goals which are clear and well defined to support learning. This practice is not yet sufficiently established to consistently drive instruction at the pace and focus required to guarantee good progress for all students.

Given the lack of detailed analysis of the performance and progress of specific groups, the setting of immediate and long-term goals is not secure. As a result, supporting plans and timeframes are not sufficiently well targeted at maximizing student achievement. This detailed analysis is needed before the school’s energies can be targeted and directed sufficiently to have the impact on the students’ progress that the school is striving to achieve.

Parents feel welcomed by the school and judge that the school does all that it can to encourage them to be active participants in their child’s education. They believe that the school goes out of its way to keep families informed and to solve any issues and problems that arise. Some families chose the school specifically because of the focus on leadership and discipline. Parents believe that the school has high expectations for their child’s progress, as well as their futures. This is demonstrated by the support provided in making the next step to high school, for example. There is a strong belief from some staff and students however, that a minority of students are not sufficiently driven by such goals and lack the focus to succeed fully.

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 doing well in English language arts to develop a curriculum that is more accessible to all students, but at the same time remains sufficiently challenging to enable achievement at the highest levels. Coaches are providing effective support for this move towards a greater focus upon learners, their starting point and the progress that they need to make. The school has recognized the need to develop this approach across other content areas, so that the curriculum is matched fully to meeting the needs of the students, provides them with access at the appropriate level and enables them to make rapid progress. The school has recognized that the relative newness of some teaching teams to the school is likely to extend the time that this takes, however. Many students take advantage of the enrichment and additional academic opportunities offered, so that attendance is high. Good attendance is also encouraged and rewarded. Resources, including staffing and scheduling, are directed appropriately to supporting the developments being undertaken.

Teachers are held accountable for the quality of their instruction. There is some effective instruction, where data is used to differentiate the support and challenge provided for students. Coaches are working well to improve the quality of instruction and its impact on the students' progress. Sometimes classes would benefit from sharper objectives and goals, however, together with a greater range of strategies and techniques to ensure more consistent engagement of the students. The school is successful in enabling many students to take responsibility for their own learning, as well as their own academic and personal growth. Some students find this more difficult however and do not engage consistently in the learning process and in developing greater responsibility for their own progress. Students confirm that there is an adult on the staff to whom they could turn should the need arise.

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.

The recruitment of teachers has been a major issue for the school. It has relied heavily upon recent graduates who have often required extensive support during their first year, but have then gone on to make a valuable contribution in their second. Unfortunately many have then moved on to other areas of work, starting the cycle over again. The school currently has a more experienced faculty than previously, with all teachers certified in their subject area, at least for some part of this year.

Professional development is consequently afforded a high priority. The school's coaches are knowledgeable and effective in supporting the teachers to improve their practice. Teachers are encouraged to learn from each other by visiting each others' classrooms, although they admit the practice is not as frequent as they would like. There are formal procedures in place to evaluate the quality of instruction, with appropriate pre- and post-conferencing with the principal. More frequent and less formal walkthroughs by the principal provide a regular and more routine assessment of quality. Coaches visit each

classroom on a regular basis. This provides them with an immediate evaluation of the impact of collaborative planning and the professional development provided.

The principal has the respect of the community, who judge this school as one that is improving. Effective work with community-based organisations is also helping to raise the students' aspirations and personal goals, through university and college visits for example. The school functions satisfactorily on a day-to-day basis, although routines are not always complied with fully or consistently. Sometimes students are tardy getting to lessons and need significant encouragement from staff. At other times teachers have allowed students to pack away early, well before sessions have actually finished. The school has the capacity to improve and to move the progress that students make to the next level, but needs a sharper focus on using its data to direct and drive its work.

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 undeveloped.

The school is becoming more effective at monitoring and evaluating the impact of its actions. This work is being supported by the wider range and greater reliability of the data being collected. Diagnostic testing is leading to processes to fill gaps in the students' understanding and skills. Analysis is also leading to comparisons between classes and to teachers asking themselves why performance gaps might exist. This in turn is leading to curriculum changes to better meet the needs of more students across the cohort.

The school's plans however, do not consistently include frequent interim goals that are specific and measurable and explain what performance should look like at key points along the journey. Evaluation of the progress towards these goals and the data generated consequently lack sharpness. Too often, staff are not rigorous enough in pinpointing which strategies and interventions have had most success, and for which students. As a result the school is not consistently spreading the use of successful strategies more widely or modifying or fine tuning those that are proving less successful. The information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress, together with the comparisons made within the data, are not used to revise plans sufficiently. Actions and energy are not always refocused quickly enough in order to reach the school's stated goals.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Renaissance Military and Leadership Academy (IS 286)	∅	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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		