



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Lower Manhattan Arts Academy

**High School 308
350 Grand Street
New York
NY 10002**

Principal: John Wenk

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Reviewer: Bruce Berry

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Lower Manhattan Arts Academy is a high school with 161 students in grades 9 to grade 10. The ethnic breakdown of the students is 50% Hispanic, 40% Black, 5% White and 5% Asian. There are 2% English language learners and 18% special education students. The school opened in September 2005 and will build towards having grades 9 to 12 over the next two years.

The school has 63% Title I eligible students. The attendance figure in 2006 was 89.2% and the attendance figure for this academic year is 88.5% to date, which is above similar and City schools. The school is an arts academy and has a wide range of partnerships with external and community-based organizations to provide an extensive enrichment program for students.

As an Empowerment School, the academy has more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment Schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's good leadership and management are having a positive impact on improving student achievement.
- There are clear plans for the future development of the school as it expands to full capacity.
- The teachers are a united team that shares the vision of continuous improvement.
- Teachers work well in teams to plan, analyze student data and action interventions.
- The school has effective assessment and goal setting procedures.
- There are effective procedures for meeting the needs of special education students.
- The school has a caring culture and is an orderly community.
- Students and parents have confidence in the school and praise the dedication of the teachers.
- The external partnerships the school has developed are having a very positive impact on the students' academic, social and cultural wellbeing.
- The school has very effective attendance procedures.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop instruction practice which has clearly defined and consistent structure in all classrooms.
- Develop differentiated instruction to provide pace, challenge and so fully engages all students at all times.
- Develop data processes to identify and provide appropriate and challenging differentiated instruction activities for gifted and talented students.
- Continue to develop the use of the periodic assessment package to inform instruction and goal setting practice.
- Continue to build the capacity of staff, through focused professional development, to further develop instruction in order to raise achievement.
- Further develop plans and goals which focus on accelerating student progress in order to raise achievement levels.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The principal has a good insight into the present position of the school and the future needs as the school expands. His good leadership and management are having a positive impact on improving student achievement. Clear plans are in place for the school's expansion over the next two years into a grade 9 to 12 high school. The principal and teachers work together to create a caring work-centered culture. As an Empowerment School, it uses periodic assessment effectively to provide student, class, grade and school progress tracking in all subjects and in curriculum strands within subjects. There is class based assessment and goal setting for units of work and grade teachers meet weekly to discuss student progress and plan intervention. The structure of instruction delivery, the pace of instruction and differentiation practice are areas which are not yet fully engaging and challenging all students at all times. Students and parents are very supportive of the school and the caring culture created by the principal and teachers. The school has many partnerships that provide academic, social and cultural experiences for the students, including theatre, arts, sports, mentoring and others.

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 effectively uses data to track the progress of students, classes and grades. Reading levels, writing conference notes, unit test assessments, attendance and behavior records are used well to monitor the progress of students. Periodic assessments are used and analyzed by a commercial company as a beneficial part of the empowerment scheme. Teachers use the data regularly to monitor impact and progress.

Effective procedures meet the needs of special education students who are fully integrated into general education and collaborative classes. They are well supported by special education teachers using pull-out and push-in. Only three students are identified as English language learners, but are all fluent English speakers, fully integrated and making good progress in general education classes. The performance of different ethnic groups is monitored through the tracking of individual student progress.

The school monitors closely the progress of groups of students in shelters and those who constantly move to the care of different adults within the extended family structure. 'Kid talk' sessions successfully highlight these issues as part of the overall assessment of progress of students. Data is not used effectively to track the progress of and plan appropriate and challenging differentiated instruction activities for gifted and talented students. The school has been open for just over one year and has little in the way of external or historic internal data to compare its own performance with other schools or with its own previous performance. However, current data shows only 30% of peer schools

have a better attendance and only 26.6% of peer schools having a better rate of earning 10+ credits in the first year.

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.

The principal and staff work collaboratively to set demanding goals at all levels across the school. Some goals are focused on the school as a whole in all curriculum areas with an appropriate focus on the integration of literacy and differentiated instruction in all classes. Another goal is to target all students to pass their exams and move to the next grade. All students identified at risk are targeted with carefully planned multiple intervention strategies and their progress monitored regularly in ‘kid talk’ grade team meetings. This strategy was successful in the 2005-2006 academic year.

At grade, classroom and individual student level goals focus on individual student progress to ensure that all students have every opportunity to move to the next grade. The school uses periodic assessment in English language arts and mathematics, ‘kid talk’ grade meetings and other data to provide interventions and support to improve student progress. Students at risk of failing in their exams in the first semester and at risk of being held down are identified and all appropriate school services deployed to support their academic progress. Students are aware that teachers have high expectations of them and this provides good motivation for the students. Students and parents have confidence in the school and praise the dedication of the teachers. Parents receive regular informative updates on progress through the record card and formal meetings with teachers. In addition, they value the fact that they are able to see teachers at any time to discuss progress or any other issue.

The principal and teachers are driven by whole school and individual student improvement. The ‘kid talk’ grade teacher sessions, during which the principal and teachers share academic, social and cultural data and make key decisions on intervention and support, is having a positive impact on raising student achievement.

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 curriculum of the school is aligned to the curriculum requirements of the Regents tests. Project based learning is a central focus of activities across the curriculum. Curriculum plans and units of work are developed using the ‘Understanding by Design’ technique and have integrated periodic assessment and goals to track student progress leading to credit accumulation. The students also undertake ‘mock’ Regents to track progress towards their readiness for the tests in the summer. Teachers are held accountable for the impact of their instruction and student progress. They plan instruction, carry out periodic assessments and initiate interventions. Although it is improving differentiated teaching is a whole school objective for improvement as it is too inconsistent.

Budget, staffing requirements and scheduling are carefully considered and decisions are based on the outcomes of internal and external data. Planning is already underway for the next two years as the school grows to full capacity. Curriculum time will be dependent on the Regents outcomes together with the development of majors in the arts in grade 11 and internships in grade 12. There will also be an arts program rotation, which will have budgetary, staffing and scheduling implications.

Instruction does not always engage all students. The lack of a clear structure in some classes leads to an undisciplined start. With no clear introduction to the activities and objectives not made explicit, students take a long time to settle to the tasks. In project activities, where students work in groups, some students are passive and disengaged, leaving much of the assignment to the other members of the group. This results in a lack of pace and challenge which leads to slower progress being made by students. Students and staff show respect for one another; students know and trust a staff member. The parent coordinator is proactive in dealing with attendance issues. Early morning calls are made to students who are known latecomers and first day calls to absentees' homes. Letters and e-mails to parents, home visits and parental conferences are effective in dealing with attendance and lateness issues. As a result attendance is high compared with other similar schools

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.

Teachers are selected by a team of staff. The rigorous process involves considering résumés, informal discussion, teaching a model lesson, feedback from students and a formal interview, including checking applicants' knowledge of instruction, student progress, use of data, expectations and care of students. The school has an extensive professional development program. All teachers have a professional development session for one hour each week. Development areas include literacy, differentiation, team teaching, student work, and discipline. The school benefits from the expertise of two consultant coaches who work directly with teachers, offering support and guidance. Three planning retreats every year and half the teachers attending national subject conferences provide additional, invaluable sources of professional growth.

The principal observes instruction formally and gives teachers written and verbal feedback. He also makes informal daily visits. Teachers also observe one another's lessons and share good practice. The teachers are a united team that shares the vision of continuous improvement. The cabinet and grade teams meet each week to analyze data, plan instruction and action interventions. The attendance, safety, and coaching teams make a valid contribution to the work of the school and to student progress. The principal is well respected by all members of the school community. He has galvanized students, parents and teachers in this new school into a united group who are focused on raising achievement. His leadership and management skills give him the capacity to effect change as the school grows. The school has a caring culture and is an orderly community. Procedures are clear and are followed by all sections of the school community.

The external partnerships and links with many external and community-based organizations are having a very positive impact on the students' academic, social and cultural wellbeing. One such beneficial partnership with a local university provides 25 tutors, three student teachers and professional development opportunities for teachers.

Programs in theatre, arts, sports, and mentoring, and after school activities provide a wealth of opportunities for students.

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 principal's good leadership and management are having an impact on improving student achievement. There are clear plans for the future development of the school as it expands to full capacity. The Comprehensive Education Plan has clear objectives and goals and progress is reviewed regularly by the principal and three times a year by all the staff at the professional development retreats. As a new school, there are only one year's outcomes of credit accumulation, but it is above City schools and well above peer schools.

Teachers regularly review plans and goals based on periodic assessment data and the school's own data. They align curriculum, instruction, goals and interventions at student, classroom and grade level based on the outcomes of data. Plans and goals are constantly under review and interventions used to refocus individual and groups of students when goals are not being achieved. The school has created a separate class for grade 10 students who failed to reach the required standard in three or more subjects in the first semester and are focused on improving progress through a range of interventions. The goal is for the students to meet the standard in all subjects to move to grade 11.

The school has a clear cycle of review, planning, monitoring, evaluation and realignment of plans and goals. Parents and teachers are involved at springtime in reviewing progress and planning the objectives and goals of the Comprehensive Education Plan, together with resources, staffing and scheduling implications.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Lower Manhattan Arts Academy (HS 308)	∅	✓	+
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	