



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Writers Today Leaders Tomorrow

**Middle School 326
401 West 164th Street
New York
NY 10032**

Principal: Sharon Weissbrot

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Reviewer: Louise Kapner

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Writers Today Leaders Tomorrow Middle School 326, is located in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan. The school opened as a new institution in September 2004 as a result of a restructuring program. It now has 548 students in grades six through eight. Students are predominantly from Hispanic homes (79%) with 20% Black students. Thirty percent of the students are English Learners with a further 13% of the students being special education students in either self-contained, collaborative class or special education teacher support services. The school is Title I eligible with a higher proportion of eligible students as compared to similar and City schools. The attendance rate of the school of the school in 2005 was 92.6% which was above similar and City schools but during this school year it dropped to 87.5%.

MS 326 was assigned a new principal this year who is an experienced leader from another school in the district. She took over her role on July 7, 2006, and encountered many barriers including not being able to access budgeting details until July 18, overseeing a move of classrooms during late August, not gaining access to her office until the beginning of September, having limited or no supplies and materials, and encountering some significant staffing issues. There is one appointed assistant principal, and one interim acting assistant principal.

MS 326 shares its facilities with MS 328, a school for grades six through eight, phased in as MS 326. There are issues of sharing common space, equitable allocation of classrooms and offices, bell schedules, and overall day to day routines that need to be addressed and that impact on the running of MS 326.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Administrators show a high level of commitment to making MS 326 a community of learners.
- The principal prioritizes issues to move the school forward.
- The principal collects and reviews available and self generated data to plan professional development and to drive instruction.
- The principal maximizes the budget allocation to purchase supplies and plan school programs.
- The principal assigns teachers to reflect program needs and within area of certification.
- The school recognizes that student attendance is a key element to creating a community of high achieving students.
- The school recognizes the need to develop a code of conduct with consequences for the acting out students.
- The school community sets high expectations for the instructional program.
- The principal implements professional development including hiring outside consultants.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to raise levels of attendance;
- Further involve members of the faculty in the interpretation of assessment data so that they have greater awareness of needs.
- Address issues of “space” with MS 328 regarding instructional areas and teacher meeting areas;
- Maintain discipline as high priority with consistent consequences for misbehavior;
- Continue and expand communication with parents regarding issues of importance i.e. safety;
- Review programming to include more time for teacher-to-teacher meetings.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

MS 326 has a full complement of students in grades six through eight for the first time this year. Since taking over in the July of 2006 the principal has made remarkable in-roads in establishing a code of conduct, implementing a full instructional program, identifying students who need additional services, staffing classes with licensed professionals, ordering materials and supplies, and opening lines of communication with parents. The principal is very familiar with all of the available data and not only accesses it but generates her own data and uses the combination to address many aspects of her work in creating a successful school of high achieving students. Limited information and resources were available from the initial two years of the school organization.

Art, music, and technology have been initiated for the first time, as well as a full range of Academic Intervention Services (AIS), a full instructional program, and students are aware of consequences for deviant behavior. The school has created a mission statement: "LASER", learning, accountability, standards, excellence and results which is beginning to make a significant impact on the overall culture of the school.

The principal is highly visible and has, in a very short time, boosted the morale of the entire school community.

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 principal of the school gathers and reviews available and school generated data on the performance and progress of all students. She is beginning to bring the faculty on board in this process. This data includes a longitudinal study for English language arts and mathematics scores for grades 6 and 7 for progress from grade to grade, a comparison intra-grade for years 2005 and 2006 for grade 6, and a review of the results for the entire school. The concern that there are no level 4 students, and an increase in students performing at level 1 shows that students were losing ground, which is now being addressed.

The school reviews the achievement of all students in the standardized exam within each level, targeting the needs of students falling in the lower, middle and upper range of each level. The data is analyzed according by various groups, including the ethnicity and gender of the students. This data was used to identify student performance, areas of need, and to set up instructional programs. Individual Education Plans and Child Assistance Program data for special education students allowed staff to develop student specific interventions. Data was also used to identify those students eligible for the extended day program. This comprehensive approach to the review and use of data is supporting the school's efforts as it gains a clearer understanding of the performance and progress of each student.

Monitoring of student progress is now built into the school's program. Individual student progress reports reflecting progress in each class were completed during the fifth week of school, translated into Spanish, and sent home via regular mail and in the students' book bags. Student portfolios are being created to provide additional monitoring opportunities. Report cards were distributed and a uniform grading system implemented, for the first time, giving realistic assessment of student performance.

A comparison of the student data from MS 328, the school sharing the building with MS 326, shows that the students in MS 328 performed higher on all standardized assessments. The student population is very similar in both schools and therefore can serve as a gauge as to where the school initially needs to strive while still creating its own goals based upon its own student specific data. The principal of MS 326 is aware of this and is quickly moving the school in this direction.

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 has been working collaboratively during the first three months of her tenure to set short and long term goals to address student learning and initiate programs to attain these goals. Data is now shared with all teachers and the principal says that for the first time teachers can now "speak student specific". The data was used for programming at risk students for extended time services and Saturday academy for 7th graders. Professional development provided by the literacy and mathematics coach is data driven and specific to areas of student need and supports teachers in setting up instructional programs. A pacing calendar for the English language arts exam was distributed to teachers to help plan appropriate reading and writing activities as they prepare students for the standardized exam in January.

All members of the school community are working together to improve student performance and a range of different meetings are held to facilitate improvement. These include monthly faculty conferences to review student data, discuss student progress and plan programming. After school per-session activities for teachers to attend voluntarily are focused on providing them with professional development. Weekly attendance meetings chaired by the principal to identify students who are not attending and need follow up. The weekly meeting of the administrators and coaches and Academic Intervention Support (AIS) teacher identifies student needs and instructional programming.

The principal meets everyday with the assistant principals to review the events of the day, focusing on instructional programs and other items of concern, and this year for the first time a consultant in English language arts visits weekly. However, much more needs to be done before there will be a significant improvement in grades and there is currently insufficient common meeting and planning time for teachers built into the programming to allow collaboration across the grade and subject areas and between grades for congruence of instruction. The school ensures that students and parents are knowledgeable about school goals and the personal achievement of students.

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.

A priority this year was to get the instructional program started as quickly as possible and to engage all students in active learning. Instructional supplies were sensibly ordered in a cyclical manner thus allowing each subject area to receive an initial set of materials to begin teaching and learning. Each of the curriculum areas were reviewed and appropriate texts that are aligned with the standards and follow the mandated curriculum as set forth by the Department of Education were ordered. Materials that are content related but at a lower level for the struggling learner, such as “Buckle Down,” provide additional instructional support are now in school. The monies allocated to the school have been used wisely to address the instructional needs of the students.

Staffing decisions were driven by the principal’s focus to create a school of high achieving students. Teachers were reassigned as per their certification, and staff was hired to provide enrichment opportunities. MS 326 now has effective programs for vocal music, art and technology. Additionally, a regents class in Living Environment is being offered after school for higher achieving students.

The school’s schedule is guided by the analysis of the data. Grouping of students allows each student the opportunity to receive appropriate classroom instruction and to participate in enrichment activities. Scheduling also includes a double period for English language arts and mathematics. Teachers and administrators are extremely happy with this as the extended time period allows for more rigorous instruction with opportunities to differentiate instruction as needed. Science is taught through active engagement of students and group work. Teachers are now being held accountable for student learning and achievement and the entire school is working together to raise student achievement

Students reflected positively on all the measures that have been implemented to ensure a safer school and one that is ensuring them the opportunity to “learn a lot.” Students now view their school as a “second home”. Student discipline has improved this year and disruptive students are dealt with firmly. Low attendance is a problem and high priority is given to improving this matter. The action taken, including holding a weekly meeting allowing for identification of specific students in need of intervention and then taking rigorous follow up has increased student attendance to over 90%.

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 principal is intent on building capacity to establish a community of learners. Staffing was and is a top priority. Assignments of teachers were made according to certification. Newly hired staff was selected through an interview process, and staff from other schools known by the principal was hired to meet the instructional needs. Improvements in the quality of teaching and learning are now evident.

Teachers feel they are a collaborative team and have melded together beautifully. Staff are observed on a regular basis and struggling teachers are provided with support from coaches, classroom intervisitations and on-going professional development. The post-

observation report is very specific and highlights the lesson and makes appropriate recommendations for improving instruction. Priority to create a skilled teaching staff is very evident. Teachers are invited to meet twice a week after school on a voluntary basis with the coaches and assistant principal. Once a month the content area teachers have formal meetings with the literacy or mathematics coach; and monthly faculty conferences are focused on providing additional opportunities to understand data to drive instruction. A Consultant from Accelerated Literacy Learning comes each Wednesday. She models lessons including conferencing with students, and then spends time debriefing and planning with the teachers and the literacy coach. A consultant for project arts is working with a social studies class and integrating technology into the content area.

Youth development staff, social worker and school counselor are very much a part of the instructional school program and support all efforts. Parents are appreciative of this positive change in school culture, now feel welcomed into the school building, and are knowledgeable of school programs and procedures. They expressed confidence in the principal but at times still feel they would like to be kept in the loop more regularly. Filling the vacant parent coordinator position will help facilitate communication between school and parents.

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.

Middle School 326 has gone through much change in a very short period and has attained a level of proficiency that could only be achieved by constant review and revision. The principal is rewriting the Comprehensive Education Plan since the one submitted by the previous administration was not approved. It is still a work in progress but is a relevant document that outlines the goals that exist now. Student progress is now monitored on a regular basis within and across classrooms and care is taken to identify what is working and what is not working. In this way the school is developing a clear understanding of students who need additional services and students who might not need as much support are identified. The "how to" for the delivery of services is always under review. Personal Intervention Plans are filled out and used as a guide for instruction; and the next interim progress reports for parents will reflect specific skills going on in the classroom.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Writers Today Leaders Tomorrow (MS 326)	∅	✓	+
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	