



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Harlem Link Charter School

Public School 329M

**134 West 122 Street
New York
NY 10027**

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

This is the second year in the existence of Harlem Link Charter School, PS 329M. It is designed to grow incrementally and currently provides an education for 162 students in kindergarten through 2. Eighty percent of the students are Black with the remaining 20% being Hispanic. Fifteen students have been identified as having special educational needs and a very small proportion are English language learners. In 2005/06 there were 20 suspensions, which equates to 20% of the school population at that time but this has been reduced to 5 students in this academic year. The attendance rate is currently at 92.8 % similar to that of other City schools. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 67% of students qualifying. This is a slightly higher percentage than in most similar schools in the city.

The school is led by two co-directors one of whom is responsible for operations and the other for instruction. Co-teaching takes place in each class and the instruction is delivered through a 'home-grown curriculum with teacher input'. The school is heavily oversubscribed with 200 applications for 54 available places this year. The school currently shares a site with two other schools and is looking for alternative premises to enable the year-on-year expansion to take place as planned.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The co-directors have worked tremendously hard to develop the school since its inception and are totally committed to its success.
- Staff members are enthusiastic and believe in the philosophy and values expressed by the co-directors of the school.
- Data collection and analysis has begun to develop over two years and the directors recognize the importance of its use to raise student performance.
- Staff members are mutually supportive and draw on each other's expertise, working collaboratively.
- Parents welcome the early contact and attention given to them and trust the school as a result.
- The school has a strong focus on meeting the needs of the less able student.

What the school needs to improve

- Clearly identify what needs to be done to sustain improvement and take a strategic view to enable this to occur.
- Devise a core curriculum with scope and sequence that explicitly identifies the skills and content to be learned, the assessment opportunities to be implemented to monitor and track student progress.
- Improve teacher understanding of differentiated instruction to ensure tasks match student abilities and consequently engage students more in their own learning.
- Increase teacher understanding of the potential of data to enable them to set long term challenging goals for each student and grade level.
- Consider carefully, and explain the philosophy underpinning co-teaching, so staff understand the practicalities and are able to maximize its potential.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school.

This school is quite distinct in that it has two co-directors as leaders and two teachers per class. This follows a belief the directors have that this is how students will learn most efficiently. The staff members subscribe to this view and are committed to the school. The level of experience of all staff is limited and this has impacted on the schools ability to make rapid progress and why it is undeveloped at the present time. The directors are well respected and realize that they need to take a more strategic view to chart the schools future development. The co-directors are aware of the importance of clearly identifying what needs to be done to sustain improvement.

The use of two teachers in a class has potential to be successful in terms of maximizing instructional expertise and increasing learning. Similarly the complimentary talents of the two directors provide the opportunity to bring a breadth to the leadership potential within the school. The instruction and leadership are developing and the school community expresses the view that there has been significant improvement in year 2 of the school's existence.

The school demonstrates a good level of care for the students and their families especially those who are most vulnerable. Parents think highly of the home visits made prior to students starting and how this is an important bond that is key to the partnership that subsequently develops. The additional knowledge of each student gained at this time enables the school to focus on an holistic approach to student learning which reflects their philosophy. The school recognizes it has many issues to address and the importance of identifying a hierarchical view so the greatest impact on learning can be made in the shortest time. The co-directors are totally committed to student success and have the ability to effect change.

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 has made a good start in data collection in the 20 months it has been open and the directors recognize the importance of its use to raise student performance. It has selected assessment materials that it believes will provide appropriate information to monitor and chart student progress. The directors are rightly candid about the information generated until the City test results of the first cohort are available in 2008 when they will be able to compare their forecasts against actual hard data.

Terra Nova assessments are used as a basis for making judgments on progress and these are supplemented by other assessments to judge the quality of reading. It is primarily the directors who undertake analysis of data and teachers are advised of the outcomes. It is recognized that staff need to gain further understanding and take ownership of the process. Data collection is less well developed in mathematics where teachers devise their own

assessments following the development of rubrics. The lack of coherence and consistency in the quality of the rubrics has been recognized by the directors and remedied in part through work with Math in the City as a professional development tool.

Before starting school all students receive a home visit from the directors, which is valued by parents and provides a more global picture of the student and their social experiences. Benchmarks are in place in kindergarten, which identify what a student knows and can do though these have been altered following analysis of student performance. The amount of data currently available is not sufficient to enable the school to discern any patterns emerging from the performance of different ethnic groups, gender or abilities though comparisons are made between the performance of classes and grades. Special education students are taught in general education classes and all have individual education plans in place and available for use. There are no specific criteria in use to identify students who are in need of extra support but the school carefully monitors those they consider at risk through the use of a study team who in turn map out a clear program for relevant students which is subsequently carefully monitored for impact.

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.

The Charter for the school contains targets to achieve over the first 3 years of its development. Only one of these, the goal that over 70% of students will achieve age appropriate performance at grade 3 according to City standards, is quantifiable. This is a given target for all Charter schools and is not based on evidence the school has. However, the directors believe that this is a realistic target though there is insufficient reliable data at present to support this premise. Teachers do not set specific goals for their class but focus on the holistic development of each student and eradicating identified areas of deficit. In some cases this means that general trends do not get identified with sufficient speed or rigor.

The school is developing a program for gifted students who meet bi-weekly to focus on mathematics. ECLAS is used to identify those students who are underperforming and additional support is made available through the academic intervention service and special needs teacher. This strong focus on meeting the needs of the vulnerable students reflects the care and concern the school has for meeting the needs of all students.

Teachers’ academic and behavioral expectation of students is variable throughout the school but parents report it has improved significantly this academic year. Parents welcome the early contact and attention given to them through home visits and trust the school as a result. They similarly appreciate the electronic copy of the record card, which keeps them informed of progress and achievement. This and access to teachers on a formal and informal basis enables parents to become involved in supporting their child.

There is recognition by all staff that to be successful then students have to achieve highly and this is the key goal motivating the school. The strategies to achieve this success, through accurate, challenging but realistic individual and grade goals is as yet undeveloped, and is not fully understood by teachers. The co-directors recognize this as a development area and its importance to the progress of the school.

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 undeveloped.

The school does not follow a mandated curriculum and expresses its intention to provide a ‘home grown curriculum with teacher input’. This is very much embryonic and teachers are at times unsure what they should be teaching and the sequence of learning steps to be followed. This is particularly evident in mathematics where some topics have to be re-planned because essential prior knowledge is not in place. The directors have recognized this as an issue and have introduced a balanced literacy approach to support instruction. More cognizance of State tests has been undertaken and the school now uses this to compare their developing curriculum with that needed to pass the City-wide tests. The school has yet to devise a core curriculum with scope and sequence, which explicitly identifies the skills and content to be learned. The assessment opportunities to be implemented to monitor and track student progress are similarly undeveloped.

Staff are enthusiastic and believe in the philosophy and values expressed by the co-directors of the school. These are not always successfully translated in to effective instruction. The quality of differentiated instruction is inconsistent both within and across classes. This leads to a level of disengagement and poor behavior where tasks fail to match learning need. One student reported, “Some of the work is boring because they (students) do not get it and sometimes because they already know it”. Each class has two teachers which impacts heavily on the budget. The directors recognize that the benefits of this system have not been maximized and several staff do not fully understand the philosophy behind it or the practicalities involved to make it a success. The co-directors are able to identify classes that under perform in comparison to others. Using this information they analyze the cause and discuss with teachers strategies for improvement, the relative harmony of the pairings and where appropriate make alterations to the teaching combinations.

Students feel safe in the school and are generally confident that staff will support them. A good partnership is developing between the school and parents. They specifically appreciate the phone call on the first day if a student is absent. This reflects the attendance figures which are broadly in line with 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 undeveloped.

The co-directors have worked tremendously hard to develop the school since its inception and are totally committed to its success. However, they are relatively inexperienced and so are the staff they lead. This has led to slower than anticipated progress in putting effective processes and practices in place to support the smooth running of the school. The learning needs of staff are wide and varied making it difficult to address them efficiently, though this is not through lack of effort on behalf of the school. All concerned recognize that there has been a significant improvement this year compared with the previous academic year but that this is just the start and much more still needs to be done.

Classroom observation takes place on a regular basis by the directors and they have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and needs of each teacher and an overview of student learning needs. The school has yet to identify clearly a cohesive plan that systematically addresses these needs in a hierarchical manner to have maximum impact on learning. Staff members welcome the observations especially when they are followed by developmental feedback or demonstration lessons to support improvement of instruction. Professional development opportunities are available for all staff and have focused on identified curricular and teacher need. Staff members consider this has had a positive impact on their practice. When the implementation of new initiatives is not supported by professional development, staff become less confident in their use and the idea does not have the desired level of impact on student achievement.

The co-teaching system lends itself to staff planning together and they are mutually supportive drawing on each other's expertise. Staff meet as grade teams and classes to discuss what went well and what revisions are required to be more effective. This collaboration is viewed by the staff as a positive learning experience that enhances their ability even though they have limited experience to draw upon. The co-directors are well thought of by the school community for their effort and enthusiasm. Teachers consider that the level of leadership has improved greatly this year as the directors become more confident in and clear about their role. The school has developed a number of partnerships with external agencies that students benefit from including camping, art, dance and environmental groups.

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 vision, of fellowship, scholarship and citizenship is clearly laid out in the schools charter. The Charter Board monitors the progress of the school and holds the co-directors to account and act as a support mechanism. School specific quantifiable targets based on data are not as yet in place. The overarching goal of over 70% of students operating at grade level is common to all Charter schools. Staff members go on a retreat in January to evaluate current goals and re-align them for the coming year and teachers express the opinion that their views are listened to. Co-directors recognizes the need for all teachers to make rigorous use of achievement data at whole school, grade and subject level to set specific, quantifiable goals if monitoring and evaluation are to be effective.

The co-directors are becoming increasingly confident in organizing and analyzing data to identify what is working well or not. This information clearly identifies the success of students following various assessments and is used to inform curriculum planning. The curriculum is realigned, when required, as in the case of reading, where an increased emphasis was put on phonics to enable students to read with more confidence. Similarly, comparisons between classes illustrated the need to reorganize teacher groupings so their individual skills were more complimentary.

The school is basing its structures on the development of overlapping teams that have specific but interdependent roles. In this way the child study team is able to closely monitor children who are at most risk and provide appropriate intervention and support which is further evaluated for impact. The school as it increases in size is becoming more flexible in its ability to meet needs as they are identified.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Harlem Link Charter School (PS 329)	∅	✓	+
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		