



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**The Collaborative Academy of Science  
Technology and Language Arts Education**

**Middle School 345  
220 Henry Street  
New York  
NY 10002**

**Principal: Mauriciere de Govia**

**Dates of review: March 28 - 29, 2007**

**Reviewer: Denis Pittman**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Collaborative Academy of Science Technology and Language Arts Education (CASTLE) is a first-year middle school located on the lower east side of Manhattan. It is housed in the Corlears Complex, sharing the building with two other schools. The school serves the educational needs of students from grade 6 through grade 8. There are 279 students enrolled in the school, drawn from an ethnically diverse population. Nearly 60% of students are Hispanic, 21% are Asian, 19% are Black 3% are White and the remainder are from other backgrounds. Approximately 14% are special education students. There are very few English language learners with six students in total. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The principal and the assistant principal wrote the proposal for the creation of the new school. The school began its new program for students in September 2006.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The administration has been very effective in creating a new learning environment which is motivating students.
- Leadership is strong, decisive and supportive which gives a sense of purpose to the school's activities.
- The relationship between students and staff is very good and contributes to the positive tone in the school.
- The school promotes a positive sense of community for students and staff which is helping to build a shared purpose.
- A culture of high expectations has been successfully established which is promoting achievement.
- A committed and enthusiastic staff work well together as a team.
- Students are appreciative of the support and guidance given, which helps them to focus on personal targets.
- The curriculum is effectively geared to students' needs and promotes their learning experiences.
- The school has established positive and mutually productive links with institutes of higher education and other community agencies which enhance the learning opportunities of students.
- Parents are increasingly supportive of the school and appreciative of the progress their children are making in the comparatively short period of the school's existence.

### What the school needs to improve

- Develop systems to improve the analysis and trends of performance of subgroups of students based on ethnicity and improve comparisons of achievement across classrooms and grades.
- Improve the assessment procedures within science and social studies to monitor progress more effectively.
- Broaden the range of staff who are directly involved with the monitoring and evaluation of teaching.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

**This is a proficient school with well developed features.**

CASTLE is a nurturing school which has successfully created an identity for itself in a very short period of time. The principal and assistant principal are effectively promoting a culture of high expectations and achievement. These expectations are set within a spirit of community which is highly supportive of both students and teachers. Relationships between students and adults in the school are very good. Students are highly motivated and are keen to participate in all aspects of the school's working life. The curriculum has a clear focus on developing literacy skills and math competencies. Teachers are reflective practitioners. Lessons are well prepared with an emphasis on providing an interactive environment for students to learn. Given the relatively small size of the school, teachers have a multiplicity of roles and responsibilities. These are carried out with commitment and energy to good effect. Parents positively endorse the openness and willingness of the school's administration to develop communication links with them. All this has created a strong foundation for the school's future development and success.

### 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 uses a substantive range of standardized tests and formal assessments effectively to provide data on the academic and personal development of all students. The school also collects and analyzes assessment data on reading levels. This data is being used well to focus upon improving the volume of independent reading amongst its students. Data is constantly reviewed to provide evidence of progress. A systematic review of item analyses of periodic assessment enables the school to identify student competencies which need to be developed. For example, an analysis has indicated that students are struggling with the concept of fractions. This information has become the basis of an action research program which has been initiated in the school. The formative assessment of students compiled by teachers is detailed and comprehensive. The analysis of this data to identify trends in progress, over time, is an area for further development.

The school has a broad awareness of trends in the data of groups of students related to ethnicity but recognizes that the analysis at this stage is not sufficiently rigorous. The program for the English language learners is good. Although the number of students is small, the analysis of their needs is detailed and provides supplementary evidence for teachers to amend their programs of instruction where appropriate. The school is generating and using secure diagnostic information about the needs of special education students. The staff also has access to the students' individual education plans to add to the data profile of individual students. The comparison of performance with similar schools and past performance analysis is an evolving process. The school has shown that it has the capacity, with its present data handling strategies, to incorporate this information when

it becomes available. The school has been reliant upon its own systems for ascertaining the progress of students due to difficulties with the external analysis of periodic assessments that have been completed.

**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 well developed.**

As a new school the identification of goals was a collaborative activity. For example, one of the goals was to create a culture of ‘continuous engagement with literature’. The focus has been on increasing the level of independent reading during the school’s first year. English language arts teachers share reading levels with all content area teachers. This effectively allows all instruction to be aligned with individual student needs. This school focus is continually referred to during meetings and discussions which evaluate improvements in students’ reading.

Data is used very well to identify issues relating to individual students. For example, teachers examine available data to design individualized goals for students during individual education plan meetings, grade level meetings and pupil personnel meetings. Case studies effectively allow grade teams to plan and set specific goals for individual students that the team has selected and gathered data for. This is illustrative of the way the school is continually exploring ways of improving its practice through data analysis.

The principal and staff have very high expectations which are clearly communicated to all. This message is conveyed through a monthly assembly called the ‘Town Hall’ meeting. During these meetings students are given information/data about the school through PowerPoint presentations and handouts and are given the opportunity to ask questions or make comments. The schools’ emerging culture also promotes the commitment to high expectations in numerous ways. For example, the school has established very effective lines of communication. This is achieved via a newsletter which is e-mailed to all school community workers to identify trends, events and/or occurrences at the school. As a supplement to this, every month a parent newsletter is sent home to CASTLE families. The parents value and appreciate the commitment to establishing strong links with the community.

**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 with well developed features.**

The curriculum is purposefully aligned with State standards. For example, the English language arts program is built around Columbia University Teachers College reading and writing project. The curriculum has been creatively developed to provide a strong English language arts and mathematics program, with a varying focus on science, social studies and the arts, related to the specific requirements of different grade levels. As a result, the curriculum is generating increasing amounts of relevant data to monitor the progress of students. The school is looking to establish a greater consistency between assessment procedures, particularly in relation to science and social studies.

Teachers are held accountable for improving instruction. Collaborative planning meetings reflect a clear commitment to providing a range of differentiated experiences according to the learning needs of students. This aspect of examining teaching practice is one of the primary focus points for the school in its first year of existence, and is therefore not yet showing its full impact. Budget decisions are driven by the needs of students. For example, the number of teachers in the school has been increased to reduce class sizes and provide the opportunity for more individual student conferencing. Scheduling decisions also reflect student requirements. Additional classes have been programmed to prepare more advanced students for Regents examinations. Financial management, resource allocation and administrative scheduling are all effectively geared towards needs identified from data analysis.

Students enjoy their experience at CASTLE. There is mutual respect between students and staff which promotes a climate of shared learning. The students find their lessons stimulating and challenging. They are strongly encouraged to be independent thinkers. Attendance is given a high priority. The commitment of the students to the school is shown in the high attendance rates.

**Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

**This area of the school's work is well developed.**

The principal and assistant principal formulated stringent criteria for the selection of the whole staff. All were required to teach a model lesson, take part in a collaborative activity and have a full interview. There are clear messages of promoting high expectations of performance and a focus on how students learn. Regular meetings with the English language arts and mathematics coaches enable issues about the comparability of standards across classrooms to be effectively discussed and analyzed. In a small school staff assume a multiplicity of roles which results in them being in a variety of teams. This helps in developing efficient communication of common issues and concerns. These formats are the basis of common planning, evaluation of outcomes and making adjustments to teaching programs in the light of the evidence produced from the data collected.

Developing professional competence continues to be a core activity of this new school. Staff have been building their capacity to improve their instruction in a consistent and systematic way. For example, involvement in the Columbia University Teachers College reading and writing project, training in administering diagnostic tests and attending offsite professional development. The school is effectively using its own resources to conduct lab sites where teachers inter-visit with one another, provide feedback and take part in the lesson. The senior administration has a detailed and rigorous procedure for formal observation of lessons. An effective protocol for these observations has been constructed. An important procedure for establishing consistency of practice is the informal walkthroughs which are conducted on a regular basis. The overall impression of these visits was fed back to the staff through the weekly newsletter where issues for consideration were highlighted. These practices are supporting the drive to improve student learning and achievement.

The principal has the respect and support of the school community. Parents are very appreciative of her openness and willingness to communicate with them and create

opportunities for their involvement in the school. They value greatly her commitment and that of the staff, in striving to achieve success for this school. School management procedures are efficient and effective and the school operates smoothly.

The school is establishing positive, productive working relationships with a range of external partners including community-based organizations. The strongest of these links is with Columbia University Teachers' College and the Henry Street Settlement / Vision Urbana, who provide an after-school program geared towards academic and recreational activities.

**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.**

Although the school has not yet created a formal comprehensive education plan, it does have clearly stated priorities for its first year. These were formulated in collaboration with the staff at a three day retreat in late summer. A major strategy was to focus on achieving consistency in instructional practice. In reviewing its management systems, the school has identified the need to promote the development of lead teachers within departments. The principal showed her adaptability and flexibility by taking on the role of mathematics coach when the position could not be suitably filled. In reviewing its current focus on outcomes, the school has identified issues for each grade. For example, in the light of higher levels of achievement in mathematics in grade 6, the school is hiring an additional mathematics teacher to provide more challenging lessons. This and other evidence is illustrative of a school which is developing its monitoring and review practices well.

The problems which the school has experienced with the analysis of data from periodic assessment mean that it has not been able to use this process to revise its plans. However, the capabilities which are being developed at present are providing a basis for the school to create its own assessment criteria and conduct the periodic assessment requirement in the future. The school has shown its ability to be adaptable in its curriculum planning by the changes it is implementing through a flexible arts program including technology, art and music. Staff have a clear perception of the goals and core purposes which drive its work. The evidence of this is shown in a range of professional activities which indicate a strong commitment to the needs of all students. The school is successfully completing the first phase of its 'strategic plan' to become a high performing school.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The Collaborative Academy of Science Technology and Language Arts Education (MS 345)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			X

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	