



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**New York City Lab School for Collaborative  
Studies**

**Middle School 312/High School 412**

**333 West 17 Street  
New York  
NY 10011**

**Principals: Brooke Jackson and Gary Eisinger**

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**Reviewer: Chrissie Pittman**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The New York City Lab School is located in the Chelsea district of Manhattan and is an amalgamation of a middle and high school. The middle school serves a population of 598 and the high school serves a population of 473 students. The school operates as a screened Option school and caters for students from Grade 6 through 12. Students come to the school from all boroughs of the City, as well as from many different cultural, educational and economic backgrounds. The ethnic composition of the school is 33.5% Asian students, 11.5% Hispanic, 6.5% Black and 48.5% White. The proportion of special education students is 12%. Less than 1% of students are English language learners.

The school is part of the Empowerment initiative. Empowerment Schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. These schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements. This school is currently engaged in a research project to design its own periodic assessment materials.

The school has two new principals; one has responsibility for the middle school the other the high school. They assumed office in September 2006. The school is Title 1 funded. Attendance is above both similar and city schools.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principals have a high profile around their schools and are respected by the parents, staff and pupils alike.
- Most of the teaching is good which promotes effective learning and good progress.
- Standards in English language arts, mathematics and science are much higher than in similar and City schools and are a result of effective teaching.
- All children are known by the staff and their behaviour is very good which helps promote a positive school ethos.
- The family atmosphere of the school is well appreciated by the parents.
- There is good collaboration between the teachers which helps promote effective planning.
- The school is developing some good assessment procedures which monitor progress well.
- There are very good enrichment activities which enhance the learning experiences of students.

### What the school needs to improve

- Provide more opportunities for teachers to observe teaching and support their colleagues in the classroom in order to share good practice.
- Ensure that strategic planning is over a longer term so that it can influence decisions proactively rather than reactively.
- Enable teachers to make better use of data to consistently differentiate their instruction so that it meets the needs of all students.
- Rationalize forms of assessment used by teachers in the different subject areas in order to get greater consistency of practice in the school.
- Improve the systems for recording attendance so that lateness can be checked more effectively.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

The New York City Lab for Collaborative Studies provides a unique learning environment with a distinct philosophy that is predicated on four defining principles of: co-operation, academic rigor, diversity and compassion. These principles are 'lived out' through the school's support and guidance of students, the professionalism of its staff and a commitment to collaboration with its community. The school's commitment to inclusion is also shown through its support and provision for special education students. Under the effective leadership of the two new principals the school is establishing a consistency of practice through a comprehensive staff development program. Teachers are very supportive and are willing to help and encourage students. Their commitment and hard work is reflected in the high standards of performance of students and the progress they make. Parents are very supportive of the school. They are very appreciative of the many learning opportunities which are provided for their children. The curriculum is designed to reflect and build upon students' interests, emotional competence and capabilities; it is successful in engaging them. The working relationship with the local community including cultural institutions is very productive in promoting the goals of the school. Given the dedicated commitment, enthusiasm and hard work of staff, the school has the capacity to sustain its established pattern of improvement.

The school's progress in generating and creating its own assessment models is good overall. The cultural shift of embedding the process of continuous interim assessment is at a transitional stage with increasing levels of commitment from staff. The school is effectively using periodic assessments materials to generate data and this is enabling it to track the progress of individual students better.

### 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 improved its measures for collecting and analyzing external data and its own information about students and is now in a better position to analyze trends in performance from the Regents tests and the outcomes of the state middle school assessment. This data is efficiently collated on a master spreadsheet where academic performance is highlighted according to grade, teacher and subject. The most recent middle school data for English language arts indicated a significant drop in the percentage of students making at least one year of progress. As a result, the writing and listening components have been identified as a focus for improvement. The detailed qualitative data collected in classrooms enables teachers to determine the students' next stage in their learning processes. The school is seeking to integrate the best aspects of this 'soft' and 'hard' data. A particular focus is for students placed at risk. The pupil personnel team

conferences bring together staff to feature a variety of data guidance reports and individualized education program conference minutes.

The school summarizes its data on the basis of ethnicity but does not use this information as a focus for its improvement strategies. Historically the number of English language learners in the school has been low so the monitoring of progress has been very individualized. More significant is the school's provision for special education students. Students who are part of the collaborative team teaching program are effectively integrated into classrooms. The monitoring of their progress in the context of these general education classes is both detailed and comprehensive. Students with learning disabilities are making good progress.

The school is able to use its involvement with the empowerment zone to make effective comparisons with other schools which are part of its network. It is evident from these comparisons the school needs to focus on improving the performance of some of its higher achieving students. The data which had been collected as part of the school's periodic assessment is beginning to revise information to identify trends in past performance even within a relatively short time period between successive marking periods.

**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.**

The school has effective systems for planning and setting goals. The regular and detailed discussion which takes place amongst teachers who share the teaching of students enables staff to identify common strengths and difficulties. This collective database effectively determines the next steps with regard to interventions. It continues to challenge the student and move them to the ‘next hardest thing’ in their learning process. In the longer term the school has wisely instigated an annual review of the programs of study.

The school has identified the need to improve the target setting and self assessment skills of students. In this context, classroom-based data gathering mechanisms are being more widely used with greater efficacy. For example, middle school classes within grades 6 through 10 have begun to incorporate portfolio databases that allow students to track their own growth, develop a clear sense of where they stand and address gaps in literacy and study skills.

The school conveys its high expectations of students in a variety of ways. For example, teachers compile ‘curriculum letters’ detailing, at the onset of the course, exactly what is expected in relation to adherence to work practices, standards of behavior and participation in activities. These letters also feature details of assessment practices and a course grading rubric. Parents are also part of this communication network. Students are encouraged to give their opinions about the courses they are taking. Surveys, interviews conferences and written reflections are very evident and provide the opportunity for students to voice their successes and needs as they understand them. This direct involvement of students, parents and staff through shared meetings and communication networks provide the basis for a common consensus for improving student performance and enhancing their progress.

**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 well developed.**

The school is effectively developing its curriculum. New courses include an accelerated curriculum for juniors and seniors as an alternative to advanced placement classes and inter-disciplinary designs in both the middle and high school. In general terms the school is producing an effective curriculum map that reflects alignment of skills and understanding in subject areas across every grade. The ‘do your own’ periodic assessment system was appropriately set in a curricular context so that teachers could consider results within their own course design.

Teachers are given significant curriculum responsibilities. They meet regularly to map curriculum content and to review data from periodic assessments and other sources. Staff work with curriculum leaders to align resources with instructional values and goals. This direct involvement with the school's activities effectively underpins teachers' accountability for improving instruction. The school's commitment to an inclusive philosophy has direct implications for teaching practice. In collaborative team teaching classrooms there are high-performing students alongside special education students with particular needs. This situation has necessitated the development of sophisticated differentiated instruction.

The budget is appropriately geared to meet the needs of students and staff. The school financially supports a number of staff development activities to improve instructional practice for the benefit of students. Extra staff are being hired to support the delivery of the collaborative team teaching program. Scheduling decisions effectively promote the objective of self managed learning through the provision of the extended day program. Students take it upon themselves to seek out extra help with their studies.

Students are actively involved in the learning experiences arranged for them. For example, in the 11th grade, students participate in a rigorous internship program two afternoons a week, working on sites in various professional environments including schools, businesses law firms and social action and non-profit organizations. Students value highly these learning opportunities. Students enjoy their experience at the school. They are enthusiastic and keen learners who are willing and able to talk enthusiastically about their experiences. They value the support, care and concern shown to them by all members of staff. The mutual respect between students and staff helps sustain the sense of community evident in the school. The students find their lessons to be stimulating and interesting. They are strongly encouraged to be active participants in their own learning.

The school gives a high priority to attendance levels and there is a very low truancy rate. However there is a significant amount of lateness which is compounded by the inefficiencies in the attendance recording mechanisms.

**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.**

All staff at the school are assessed on the basis of their ability to demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity, a willingness to collaborate, their academic rigor and

compassion. The school contends that these attributes should be present in a teacher's dealings with students, parents and other staff. The school also insists that staff have high expectations for student outcomes and progress and that they can use data to measure this. These high expectations are continually reinforced on a daily basis.

Professional development structures have evolved around the training and learning requirements associated with the curriculum programs provided at the school. These have been successful in raising the confidence and competence of the staff. For example, the entire faculty has participated in a full day balanced literacy workshop specifically focusing on school issues. In addition, teachers have participated in voluntary after-school sessions on the topics of formative and summative assessment; assessment versus grading; and rubric design. The school encourages inter-visitation between classes to facilitate the sharing of ideas and promoting self-evaluation. The substantial programme of after school activities is effectively geared towards improving student outcomes.

The two principals recognize the importance of achieving consistency of practice across both schools. To that end they have devised a programme of scheduled observations of lessons. A prime objective has been the establishment of an observation protocol in order to provide constructive feedback. Currently both principals recognize that there is a need for them to be in lessons with greater regularity. They plan collaboratively along with other key staff to improve instruction. A particular focus has been on 'accountable talk'. Teachers have been modelling strategies for dealing with this process in workshops arranged in small learning groups. These scaffolding strategies have been successful in supporting staff in promoting this work in their classrooms. These successful outcomes arise from the collaboration of the staff and the successful way they plan in teams

The school is at a transitional stage. The principals, in their new roles, are working hard to establish their separate and collective identity with the staff, students and parents. They are working carefully to draw attention to change processes and managing emotions that accompany them. In this respect a successful start has been made. The school is welcoming to students, parents and visitors. It is being managed well and effective systems and procedures ensure that the school runs smoothly. Students know where to go and what to do.

The school works well with outside agencies and institutions. It maintains strong links with Columbia University and New York University. Students enjoy offsite internships with local businesses and organisations. Parents are encouraged to take part in the school. The school is becoming increasingly successful in promoting greater family participation and support for its open communication.

**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 school has a detailed Comprehensive Education Plan which is the focus for what the school is seeking to achieve in promoting its defining principles. Teachers are actively engaged in collaborative work in setting the goals and targets for the school. This aspect of engaging the whole school community in identifying and promoting its goals is a defining feature and strength of the institution. This diagnostic assessment is collected from a number of sources. For example, reflections are correlated from teachers via preference

sheets, from parents via conference meetings and students via the student government. The synthesis of these views provides the focus of how the needs of all students are to be met including effective intervention strategies and programs for those students with specific need, for example students who are involved in the collaborative team teaching programs. The assessment and use of data collected in this reviewing process is central to the school's strategies for change and development.

The principal's have correctly determined that at this transitional stage, the involvement of staff in planning for the future, promotes a shared consensus about the school's goals and commitment to improvement. The school is using interim data to ensure that 'design your own' assessments focus more systematically on the outcomes of student work particularly in relation to literacy skills and adjusting instruction accordingly. In a similar vein the school recognizes that in some high school classes, the progress of high-performing students has been impeded by the lack of challenge in developing their full potential. The strategies which are being used for differentiating the instruction of students with special education need are being reviewed to see how they may be used to satisfy the needs of high performers.

The school has shown itself to be flexible and responsive in its use of assessment procedures. For example, the commitment to producing its own 'design your own' periodic assessments is evidence of this. The school is planning to give those teams, who are involved in these periodic assessments, dedicated time in order to review the assessments and guide instruction across the relevant grade. The effective review procedures which the school has put in place show that it has the capacity to sustain change and improvement. Given the emerging nature of the combined schools strategic planning is not over a long enough period to allow for greater strategic perspective.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: NYC Lab School For Collaborative Studies (MS 312/HS 412)</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	