



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**The Louis Armstrong Elementary School**

**Public School 143**

**34-74 113 Street  
Queens  
NY 11368**

**Principal: Sheila S.Gorski**

**Dates of review: April 25 – 27, 2007**

**Reviewer: Marilyn Lehmann**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Louis Armstrong Elementary School has 1189 students from kindergarten through grade 5. Around 48% of the students are English language learners and 10% are special education students. Ninety-three per cent are Title 1 eligible. The majority of students (almost 90%) are Hispanic, with 2.4% Black, 2.1% White and 5.6% Asian and other. Attendance, at approximately 95%, is above that of similar and City schools.

The school is full to capacity, with grades 1 through 5 and one kindergarten class housed in the main building, the other kindergarten classes and some grade 1 classes in a mini building and the remaining grade 1 classes in portable classrooms.

This is the principal's second year in post, and two of her assistant principals are newly in post this year. In November the principal accepted an invitation for the school to join the Accelerated Schools Academy (ASA) network, which she felt would help the school to accelerate both students' progress and staff professional development. The network gives the school access to extra support with literacy and academic intervention, and keeps the school informed about developments in mathematics as well as professional development opportunities.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Outstanding leadership motivates staff and students and sets a clear vision and direction for the work of the school.
- The school consistently gathers and effectively utilizes a wide range of data to measure its performance and to inform all aspects of its planning.
- The principal, ably assisted by the rest of the administration, works effectively with faculty to promote a collaborative culture that supports high quality teaching and enables students to make good progress.
- Students, parents and staff view the school as very committed to providing the best possible educational experience for the students, and respond positively to the school's very high expectations for work and behavior.
- Regularly updated data is used well to track individual student progress and ensure that each student's program is appropriate and challenging.
- Students have a high regard for their teachers and all members of the school community treat one another with respect and consideration.
- Students enjoy participating in a wide range of enrichment activities which enhance their self-esteem and confidence and contribute to their ability to progress.
- Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are focused on raising achievement and are soundly based on identification of needs revealed by detailed analysis of the student data.
- Excellent displays of teaching prompts and students' work throughout the well-kept building help raise students' aspirations and encourage learning.
- The principal and her colleagues in the administration are very open to new ideas, are flexible and able to respond quickly to meet changing needs and are constantly seeking ways to strengthen the drive for improvement.

### What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all teachers have a clear understanding of students' progress in a whole-school context, so that medium and longer-term goals are meaningful and appropriately challenging.
- Further develop teachers' abilities to set measurable, time-framed goals for students' improvement in order to accelerate each student's learning.
- Build on existing good practice to further develop teachers' skills in differentiating effectively to meet the needs of all the students.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

The Louis Armstrong School collects a wide range of data which it uses very effectively to analyze students' progress. As a result, plans to raise students' achievement are well informed and regularly updated to meet students' needs.

The school has created an attractive and lively learning environment in which students are enabled to make good progress. Parents hold the school in high regard and see it as a safe and welcoming place where members of staff care about the students and see their education and welfare as being of the highest importance.

The school is constantly seeking ways to promote students' achievement. For example a number of grade 5 students have been acting as "Concept Leaders" to tutor younger students and help them improve their literacy skills. This has not only helped the younger students' progress but has also added enormously to the 5th graders' confidence and motivation.

The principal's determination to help every student succeed is shared by all members of the school community, and the school is in a good position to continue to improve.

### 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 well developed.**

The school consistently gathers and utilizes a wide range of data to inform its evaluation of students' progress. Students are carefully tracked using a range of assessment tools, including running records and unit tests as well as standardized tests, and their needs and strengths are reviewed weekly at meetings of the curriculum writing group. For example, the Early Childhood Language Arts Assessment System (ECLAS-2) is used to establish benchmarks, and teacher conference notes as well as outcomes from Princeton Review, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and other tests identify progress made by individual students. The data is broken down and analyzed and used to inform planning for instruction specific to each student within each class.

Performance and progress are measured against previous past performance and results of similar schools to identify strengths and weaknesses. Relevant data is closely analyzed by the administration on a very regular basis to monitor trends, and account is taken of the performance of groups and classes as well as of individual students. Consideration is given to issues of gender and ethnicity and to the performance of other categories of interest. For example students doing particularly well and those identified as possible 'at risk' students are carefully monitored and attention paid to providing the necessary support to improve achievement. The school particularly focuses on its large number of English

language learners and continuously scrutinizes the relevant data to provide an objective constantly updated understanding of their progress.

Not all teachers, as yet, share an understanding of students' progress in a whole-school context so they are less able to set meaningful medium and longer-term goals.

**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.**

All members of staff contribute to a comprehensive needs assessment across all curriculum areas that is used to establish goals and determine strategies. The longer-term goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan are supplemented by focused time-framed action plans, agreed with ASA, for mathematics, literacy and academic intervention which are revisited and redefined every six weeks. One focus has been to strengthen teachers' conferencing skills to support students' development in literacy, and this has helped improve teachers' understanding of each student's progress and how to plan next steps. However teachers are not all equally skilled at using this information to set measurable time-framed goals to accelerate learning.

Careful attention is given to students in greatest need of improvement, including those achieving higher levels as well as students identified as 'at risk'. Based on data outcomes the administration makes recommendations for groupings within classes and about higher order thinking and questioning techniques to ensure that higher performing students continue to improve. Strategies for students performing at a lower level, including additional intervention offered as part of the extended day, are constantly reviewed and revised by the academic intervention team so that these students are best enabled to progress.

Students, parents and staff view the school as very committed to providing the best possible educational experience for the students, and respond positively to the school's very high expectations for work and behavior. Parents are very positive about new programs in reading and mathematics and are proud of their children's achievements. They say their children are doing well and have achieved "a very good standard of knowledge when they reach junior high school". They appreciate the attempts the school makes to keep them informed and to seek their involvement.

**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 great deal of thought and energy is put into making the curriculum varied, meaningful and challenging. For instance, the school has introduced the Reading First program because it believes that the resources and teaching strategies are appropriate to help all students, including its very large number of English language learners, to progress better in English language arts. Classrooms are organized to enable students to work collaboratively in pairs and varying groups. Excellent displays of children's work, teaching

prompts in classrooms and corridors and large murals on the corridor walls representing characters from the students' favourite stories, create a warm and lively learning environment.

Teachers generally have a good understanding of the ways in which they can help students to remain on task and learn effectively. In most classrooms the students know what they are doing, and why they are doing it. Lessons are mostly well planned and structured and follow practiced routines and procedures that provide students with a coherent and purposeful experience which helps to reinforce their understanding of what they have been asked to do. However not all teachers are equally skilled at offering effectively differentiated instruction and so some students make slower progress.

Teachers and other staff have clear expectations of their students and in response the children generally work hard and behave well. The students feel that they are treated with respect and every student knows who to turn to if they need help. Attendance is good because students want to be in school; they say the school is very friendly and that teachers 'want you to do really well'.

Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are focused on raising achievement and are soundly based on identification of needs revealed by detailed analysis of the student data. For example a bilingual guidance counselor makes a valued contribution to the school's work with its many English language learners, and additional resources, including bilingual books and technology based interactive programs such as 'Imagine Learning' and 'Headsprout' are used to enhance students' learning. Specialist teachers, such as for physical education and music, contribute well to broadening students' experience, skills and confidence.

**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 has the highest expectations of her staff. When hiring she looks for commitment to raising achievement, the potential for reflective practice, and a willingness to develop the necessary skills in use of data. She is passionately committed to enabling all her students to achieve the highest possible standards. Teachers see her as "very student focused" and describe how she sets the tone, including an emphasis on speaking respectfully to students. Ably assisted by the assistant principals she has encouraged the development of a collaborative culture that puts all its energies into advancing the students' performance. The principal demonstrates significant capacity to manage continuous improvement; for example, teachers say "she has empowered staff" and encourages collaboration "in every direction, especially across and through grades".

Members of the administration are constantly around the school visiting lessons frequently on a formal and informal basis to identify good practice and areas that need improvement. Professional development is given high priority and is arranged to meet identified needs. Further improving classroom practice is high on the school's professional development agenda and decisions about provision are informed by information from classroom observations in addition to a school-wide needs analysis. Teachers particularly appreciate the common preparation and planning times and the opportunities for inter-class visitations as opportunities for sharing good practice.

The school's procedures are well established and ensure that things run smoothly. In addition to the extended-day provision the school offers a wide range of enrichment activities which help enhance students' self-esteem and confidence in their ability to progress and are carefully chosen on the basis that they must add value to students' school experience. Students enjoy the activities which "are unusual and fun", citing yoga, karate, acting, gymnastics, chorus and Japanese calligraphy as examples. Parents confirm that these activities help their children improve their achievement because "they want to be in school".

**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 well developed.**

The goals identified in the Comprehensive Education Plan are a point of reference at all planning meetings; for example the decision to invest in the 'Imagine learning' and 'Headsprout' interactive programs stemmed from goals to improve literacy skills. The plan is reviewed and revised during the year and modifications help inform the following year's plan. Progress through action plans to achieve the goals is monitored weekly and plans are subject to change depending on the data. The plans are also revisited every four to six weeks to evaluate in detail the effectiveness of strategies being used and to update them in response to the findings.

The administration ensures that data is shared as soon as it is available which enables teachers and administration to make ongoing comparisons of students' progress within and across classes and grades. The school also frequently compares its performance with that of other schools to help it measure the success of its plans and interventions.

The principal and her colleagues in the administration are very open to new ideas, are flexible and able to respond quickly to meet changing needs. They are constantly seeking ways to strengthen the drive for improvement; for example they persuaded the Read First providers to allow them to deliver the grade 2 program to a 3rd grade class of English language learners because analysis of the data indicated this would better meet their needs and accelerate their learning.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The Louis Armstrong Elementary School (PS143)</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