

51st Avenue Academy
(The Path to Academic Excellence)

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Elmhurst
Queens, New York 11373

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PART 1: The School Context.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school educates 600 students in 4th and 5th grades from the district of Queens. The school is popular and has a good reputation in the community.

Class sizes are between 25 and 30 students. Students' standards on entry into 4th grade are broadly average. The school has significant proportions of special education students, and English language learners. Students typically have Hispanic and Asian backgrounds.

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PART 1: OVERVIEW

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Students attain higher standards compared with all and similar schools in grade 5. The school is in good standing in all subjects tested in 2005 and 2006. Test scores in social studies have risen significantly. Some students' records show good growth.
- School management is well developed. There is a positive culture of reflection, hard work and joint decision-making. The literacy and mathematics coaches use data and diagnostic tools well to inform their work. Scheduling meets students' needs.
- Some work in mathematics that is typically a grade 5 target is now taught in grade 4.
- The curriculum is interesting to students and is aligned to the school's priorities. All in grade 5 enjoyed the students' performance of Macbeth. There is a high degree of relevance in students' work. Displays of work are attractive and informative. Looping helps to provide continuity for students year-to-year.
- Students' standards of work in art are high.
- The school uses its wide range of data well to monitor students' performances for example at teachers' grade meetings, and for interventions. Students with similar abilities, English language learners and special education students receive good attention.
- Relationships, behavior, attitudes to work are well developed and students are advised well by the school.
- Students are well engaged in their work and understand how doing well at school will help them in future. Attendance is high.
- Extra time students benefit from close attention to their needs. Teachers use this time effectively to consolidate mandated students' knowledge and skills in English and mathematics. Students who stay voluntarily after school enjoy the many activities, such as chess.
- Vulnerable students are well supported and make well-developed progress, for example, with extra reading practice.
- Students know where they stand. They have good individual knowledge of their strengths and areas for development.
- Teachers have expertise and model ideas well for students; they make lessons interesting, develop students' thinking capacity well and engage them purposefully in learning. Collaborative teaching adds to the positive experience for students, they receive more and varied attention to their needs.
- Parents and students' have very positive views of the school.

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WHAT THE SCHOOL NEEDS TO IMPROVE

- Improve students' standards in mathematics in grade 5.
- Improve students' standards in science (their understanding of scientific vocabulary and expressions) and make more rigorous checks on data, teaching and learning.
- Develop the quality of students' use of technical vocabulary in their writing in grade 4.
- Improve the information technology Internet access wireless network so that is reliable.
- Improve the display screens in some classes so that students can see what they have to do more clearly.
- Develop further the use of data to show clearly the added value (growth) the school adds to individual students, by linking all the sources of data into one system.

PART 3: MAIN FINDINGS

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school that makes good use of data to accelerate students' progress. There is a strong commitment to continuous improvement. The Principal provides a very clear sense of educational direction that is shared by all stakeholders.

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

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.

This area is well developed.

The school has high expectations in all its work. This is a school that uses data intelligently to help students do better. As a result, there has been a steady upward trend in the school's results in the last four years. The school's test and examination results in 2005 and 2006 are held in good standing by the Department of Education. Teachers are particularly pleased with this year's results in social studies. Standards in students' art are high and displays are used very well to show what students can do.

The well-developed systems for gathering data have allowed the school to clarify where it needs to improve to accelerate students' progress further. Careful examination of students' work and test papers shows that in grade 5, students need to improve their understanding of fractions, division and multiplication in mathematics. Teachers have also discovered that students' standards in science have been negatively affected by their lack of understanding of some scientific vocabulary and expressions.

The school's annual report card 2005 shows that students are performing better at 51st Avenue than in similar and all schools in English Language Arts and mathematics in grade 5. Grade 4 tests show results that are comparable to similar and all schools in these subjects. Science results in grade 4 have been lower. Through examination of student performance data and their work, the school has identified the need to develop the quality of students' use of technical vocabulary generally in their writing in grade 4.

The school can show that some individual students are showing good growth over the two years they are in the school. The school's records are detailed and comprehensive at student level, but the information is held on several different systems, which makes interpretation of individual students' performances more difficult than it needs to be. More general patterns in performance data, such as about the amount of growth students make in the different grades and in subjects, would be more easily discovered if there was one unified system into which all data is placed.

English language learners (ELL) and special education students are well supported and

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make good progress because their needs are diagnosed effectively. Attendance is high because systems for ensuring students attend regularly are well developed.

Teachers use a wide variety of data to keep a check on individual students' standards of work and the progress they are making. Teachers collect data effectively through discussion with students about their progress. The school monitors students' progress and performance, for example, through tests and rubric based assessments of their work. Teachers give students feedback and they know clearly what is expected of them and how to improve. The school has been able to improve the quality of instruction and develop the curriculum to better meet the needs of students as a result of its good use of data.

Quality Statement 2: 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 is well developed.

Improving students' progress drives the activity of all members of the school community. There is a strong sense of working together at 51st Avenue for the common good of students, under the strong leadership of the Principal and Assistant Principal. The school's rising performance over recent years is proof that the school has been dedicated to this process.

The school gives well-developed attention to the interpretation of all aspects of data, including at student, classroom, grade level and by academic subject. Attendance records, student conference records and test scores are all used as indicators of whether students are well engaged in their work or not.

Teachers know their students well at an individual level. A large amount of data about them is held in a variety of ways. As a result, the school has identified some highly specific areas for development in students' work, such as about how well they conclude their work. The school is good at setting measurable targets over time, and students have a good idea of what they need to do to graduate.

Teachers are clear about the performances of different ethnic groups and about gender related performance. They know what works for groups and when to change ways of organization to accelerate the progress of groups further, such as for ELL. The school immerses these students in basic English lessons rather than provide bilingual lessons. The school has found that this approach works well, while acknowledging that students perform significantly less well in tests. The school has convincing reasons why ethnic groups perform as they do and seeks to meet their respective needs. The school's Annual Report shows that boys and girls perform similarly.

Parents and students confirm that the school has high expectations of their children.

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Parents are regularly invited to hear about their child's academic progress. Parents are pleased with the level of contact with the school. The exchange of information at meetings and on report cards, which are sent home regularly, is helpful. The information shared helps in setting reasonably challenging goals for students and evaluating students' improvements from time to time.

Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area is well developed.

The school's name, "Path to Academic Excellence," is fitting. The quality of teaching is well developed, students' performances continue to improve and they enjoy school very much. The Principal and staff ensure that teaching and learning, the curriculum and the use of money have a positive effect on students' progress.

The school has adapted the curriculum so that it is taught at a speed that accelerates the progress of all students, yet through good differentiation meets the needs of special education students too. Because the school's gives good attention to data, teachers concluded a while ago that some aspects of the grade 5 curriculum for mathematics needed to be taught in grade 4 so that students have more time to consolidate their ability to use multiplication and division routines and understand fractions.

Much effort has gone into making staffing and resource decisions work for the benefit of students. A good variety of data is used to identify issues for improvement. For example, the Principal has carried out a good program of teaching observations. She has observed full lessons and also carried out 'walkthroughs', that is, brief visits to several classrooms to check that, for example, student engagement is good. Teachers receive feedback and have opportunities to improve what they do as a result. Standards have risen as a result of this process. Science teaching has not had the same attention as English and mathematics and this factor goes some way to explaining why standards are lower.

The school has properly identified the need for information technology (IT) to be integrated into lessons, to accelerate students' progress. The school's network is not up to the job. It is not powerful enough and is unreliable. This weakness is holding back students' progress in this important area of using IT as a tool to aid learning in other subjects.

Teaching is well developed. For example, teachers are expert and dedicated. Lessons are interesting and teachers have a good knowledge of elementary subjects and of students' rate of progress day-to-day. Teachers engage students very effectively by, for example, getting them to settle quickly into very good work routines. Students who took part in the performance of Macbeth enjoyed their performance greatly, as did the grade 5 audience and parents. The actors developed their memories and capacity to speak in public very well.

Students' relationships, behavior and attitudes to work are well developed. They understand how doing well at school will help them in future. Procedures to improve attendance are rigorous and data is used well to identify any student who has begun not

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to attend school regularly. There is a sense of common purpose in the school that begins with swearing allegiance to the flag each day. The school employs collaborative teaching techniques, where two teachers are present in a classroom. This is worthwhile. Students benefit from the expertise of two teachers in a lesson.

The only weakness observed in the teaching was the poor quality of the projected information for students to read in two classrooms. Students could not read what the teachers intended easily, which slowed their progress.

Students are advised well by their teachers and consequently they have positive views about the school. Each student has an adult to whom they can turn to.

Quality Statement 4: 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 is well developed.

The school is a happy one. The Principal and the staff share their high expectations of the students with them. The school is led very well by the respected Principal. She has a clear vision, which is to accelerate students' progress and prepare them as well as possible for their middle school education. Decisions, planning and evaluation of results are shared effectively in teams of teachers and there is no complacency. Teachers collaborate to ensure that all students focus on realizing as much of their potential as possible. The school runs smoothly under the close scrutiny of the Principal.

Many aspects of the leadership and management of the school are well developed. Teachers are carefully selected; they work together well. An important innovation is the looping that teachers do with their classes. In order to reduce the stress on students at the end of each year, teachers stay with their classes for the full two years. Undoubtedly, students are happier with this arrangement. Crucially, all the data and unwritten knowledge that teachers gain in a year is available for the second year. Continuity is therefore good.

The Principal uses training of existing staff to help improve the school and accelerate students' progress. Professional development of teachers is carefully considered. The program meets teachers' needs so that they can meet those of students better.

The school's process of self-evaluation has led to an accurate evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses; therefore the school's capacity to improve is good. The school responds to its self-evaluations positively. For example, teachers revise plans and methods to improve students' performance and progress regularly.

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Quality Statement 5: 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 is well developed.

The school has well-developed procedures for evaluating students' progress and for identifying strengths, as well as weaknesses. Students' performances in tests are good evidence of the success of the school's cycle of evaluation. Diagnostic tests and assessments play an important part in the process. The literacy and mathematics coaches have a valuable part to play in the process of accelerating students' progress. They, for example, examine data and model good lessons for other teachers to see and learn from.

Regular discussions about assessments between teachers and students and between teachers contribute positively to the process of accelerating students' progress. Teachers set students relevant interim goals and all concerned have a clear notion of whether their individual plans are on track to meet the end of year goals.

Teachers make appropriate comparisons of students' performances in classes. The Principal and staff regularly look for ways of helping individual students do better. Individual teachers diagnose strengths and weaknesses in what students can do, and if necessary make changes to lesson planning.

Any student target that is in danger of not being met is discussed, and redefined if necessary. The school provides a good program of extra time at the end of the school day to compensate for any students' lack of progress. Many students stay at the end of the day voluntarily and enjoy the many activities, such as chess and art activities. The school provides a well-rounded education for its students.

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Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.	o	✓	+
<p>1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, math, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are “objective” when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards-based, • consistent across students, • capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice, <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the performance of different students to be compared, and • learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified. 		X	
<p>1.2 The school makes effective use of the data to assess the performance and progress of students by racial and ethnic groups, English Language Learners and special education students, and all other categories of interest to the school.</p> <p>{This criterion and the next are partially aspirational as of now. City and State Report Cards and Division of Accountability and Assessment reports provide only some of the necessary data. The NYC DOE will soon provide schools with fuller access to better data.}</p>			X
<p>1.3 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, racial and ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.</p>			X
Quality Statement 2: 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.	o	✓	+
<p>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 it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.</p>			X
<p>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 warranting attention.</p>			X
<p>2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.</p>			X
<p>2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. That information is central to setting reasonably challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.</p>			X
<p>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.</p>			X

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Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	o	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals.		X	
3.2 Decisions about the use of teacher and student time are based on the organization of the day and week needed to inform teachers about each student's performance and next learning steps, set goals and plans for improved student learning, and implement and continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals.		X	
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.5 Teachers are accountable for student outcomes. 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
3.6 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
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.9 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	0	✓	+
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 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 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including, when possible, by comparing outcomes across classrooms and schools. The school monitors its performance and tackles weaknesses. Even in areas where the school is successful, leadership is not complacent, but aims to improve further. The goal in all cases is to improve student and school performance and progress.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.			X
4.5 The Principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.			X

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Quality Statement 5: 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.	o	✓	+
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 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 interim 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 each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.			X