



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Laboratory School for Finance and Technology

Middle School 223

**360 East 145 Street
Bronx
NY 10454**

Principal : Ramon Gonzales

Dates of Review : January 25 - 26, 2007

Reviewer : Jan Lomas

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Middle School 223, The Laboratory School of Finance and Technology, serves a small school population of 473 students from grades 6 through 8. This school is in its fourth year of existence.

Eighty-nine percent of students have Title 1 eligibility which is higher than similar and City schools. Fifteen percent are special education students and 18% are English language learners. The school is a multicultural community where the proportion of Black students is 28%, 72% are Hispanic and the remaining 1% are White. The percentage of students who have recently arrived in the country is 4.8%, which is lower than City and similar schools.

The rate of attendance is 91.2%. This is higher than that for similar schools and very similar to that for City schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is an inspirational leader who has engaged the passionate commitment of all staff to strive towards achieving the best for those in their care.
- The principal has a clear understanding of the use of data to underpin continuous school improvement and is effectively leading others to develop their skills.
- Teaching staff readily rise to the challenge of being held accountable for improving instruction and are actively involved in taking the school forward.
- The collaborative culture has resulted in the development of a vigorous, reflective team who are constantly learning with and from each other.
- The school embraces change and is open to adapting, revising and improving strategies in order to achieve success.
- Students are engaged by their learning, have respect for their teachers, appreciate their care and want to come to school.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school, its expectations and its strengths.
- The school runs smoothly on a day to day basis and student behavior is carefully and sensitively managed.
- Relationships within the school are open and candid but respectful of each individual and their learning and personal needs.
- Students enjoy the variety of opportunities for learning technology and other enrichment activities.

What the school needs to improve

- Build on the valuable steps forward made to enable all teachers to translate data into carefully tailored instruction which is adapted to meet students' needs.
- Continue to develop rigorous and systematic structures to enable precise tracking and comparison of student progress in priority areas.
- Develop further opportunities for teachers to explore and deepen the range of strategies and approaches they can use in order to continue to hone the quality of instruction.
- Extend opportunities for students to self-evaluate, participate in setting goals for their progress in all subjects and contribute to school self-evaluation and development.
- Refine the use of strategic planning as a meaningful tool which supports effective monitoring and evaluation of progress towards goals.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

This is a proficient school with many well developed features.

The Laboratory School for Finance and Technology, Middle School 223, is in its fourth year of existence. The principal has already been successful in establishing a culture which is conducive to learning for staff and students. Students are able to say that this school is 'somewhere people really help you to learn'. Staff are energetic, motivated and passionate about taking the school forward. The principal has high expectations of all and enables staff to grow and develop as professionals who collaborate and share in the task of continuous school improvement. Parents recognize the commitment of the principal and all his staff and agree with the students who say 'teachers really care.' The school has made important steps forward in setting in place a curriculum which engages young people and in developing systems and structures which underpin the clear drive to raise achievement. The school already has many well developed features. Time will be needed to begin to fully see the impact of new initiatives and systems and for the young teaching staff to become established and their collective and individual strengths to be consolidated.

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 is making good progress in establishing tools and strategies which enable a sharp focus upon student progress and achievement in order to quickly see where plans and strategies need to be adjusted. These have been developed collaboratively and reflect the staff's clear recognition of the importance of using data in an effective way to underpin all they do to meet students' needs. The school plans to continue to improve and develop data collection and analysis at a strategic level and within day to day classroom work. They are determined that all tools and measures are tailored to the school's needs and illuminate patterns and trends in data in a meaningful way.

Data about progress in core areas is now being collected in a format that can clearly show growth over time for each student and reveal whole class and grade trends over the year. The principal and senior staff have analyzed the key messages and are now using these to share comparisons with all teachers. The school uses the structure of the curriculum well to generate valuable data through the use of rubrics in English language arts that are broken down to show each individual strand of key objectives. This means that the mapping of student progress can be finely tuned to demonstrate not only what students know and can do but also where further teaching and reinforcement needs to take place. There is an acute awareness of the need to improve many students' basic skills and reading is tested across the school at key points in the year. Patterns of growth are scrutinized and coaches and senior staff discuss these patterns with teachers. Clear reporting structures and lines of accountability mean that issues are addressed directly and steps forward can be made in a timely fashion.

These strategies demonstrate the commitment to raising achievement through developing the use of data to drive instruction and curriculum planning. Improvements are already being seen although patterns and trends are, as yet, uneven across grades and further time will be needed for all initiatives to become embedded practice and to see their full impact. The principal is adding to the range of ways data and performance is compared through identifying similar schools who might offer opportunities for intervisitation and discussion to explore practice and strategy.

Year to year performance is well analyzed and the principal has a good grasp of key trends. These are discussed with staff in order to ensure a coherent whole school view. There is a clear overview of the relative performance of ethnic groups and gender in each grade and this means that the school can prioritise how to respond to emerging needs. The progress of special needs students and English language learners is carefully monitored through the school's routine procedures and, for the former, through individual education plans. The school does not always take every opportunity to use strategies such as focused classroom observation or specific discussions with groups of students to check that teaching is equally effective for all sub-groups.

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.

The Comprehensive Education Plan evolves through a collaborative process involving all staff who review school development to date and establish goals for the next year. This reflects the collegiate culture within the school. The team structure enables teachers to work effectively together to discuss data and develop planning, instruction and strategies. Discussions are well-focused and have a clear sense of collective purpose because teachers are well informed about school priorities and goals. Many teachers are in the early years of their career. There is a continued need to strengthen their capacity to gather classroom data and use it alongside longer term assessments to plan instruction matched to students' needs.

The focus upon addressing the needs of students whose progress is of most concern is reflected in the very detailed and careful planning for extended school provision. This supports all teachers in making the best use of time to effect improvement in student performance in core areas. The school identifies students for academic intervention services or small group support in the classroom by analyzing their mastery of key objectives. Records are kept which capture the key elements of communication between academic intervention specialists and class-teachers to ensure continuity. Students add their own reflections about their progress.

Parents' representatives speak with great respect about the school, its caring and hardworking teachers and the principal's open and responsive approach. They feel that their children are making pleasing progress and they support the school's high expectations. One guardian said that 'he has improved so much that we are shocked. He has opened up like a flower'. Students use rubrics in order to self-evaluate and know how well they are doing through teaching strategies such as conferencing. The school does not, as yet, enable students to develop their independent learning skills by taking an active part in the formulation of their own targets and by involving them in school self-evaluation

activities. The school is characterized by the collective drive towards a culture of continuous improvement. One teacher commented that he was prepared to go the extra mile because everyone else does the same thing and say 'what next?'.

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 curriculum is mapped against the mandated requirements. In some core areas, rubrics have been broken down into finer objectives which allow for careful tracking of the development of key skills and concepts. This kind of development means that the curriculum is generating data which is analyzed and used for the subsequent fine tuning of instruction. The extended day curriculum is well-planned to accelerate student progress. After school programs provide a range of opportunities focused upon the needs of different groups of students including classes for English language learners, higher achievers in mathematics, a robotic class popular with special education students and mentorship for boys who are at risk of becoming disaffected. Budgeting, scheduling and staffing are all driven by identified needs. For example, the scheduling of the school day and some particular sessions have been effectively organized to ensure that critical teaching time is not lost.

Teachers are held accountable not only through the clear team structure and reporting systems within the school, but also through the culture of high expectations and professionalism modeled by the principal. This is balanced by his collaborative approach which enables and motivates all to participate. Staff are often proactive in identifying ways that the school can improve and in working together to find solutions. Teachers work hard to develop instructional methods which engage students who talk about classes that are 'fun ' and the days that 'go fast'. They particularly enjoy the well-structured opportunities to learn about, and through the use of, technology. Attendance is rising, which the principal attributes not only to consistent monitoring, but also to students' increasing eagerness to attend. Many of the staff are new to teaching and they are enthusiastic about continuing to develop their professionalism. Capitalizing upon this would further develop the range of strategies they have at their finger tips in order to effectively structure and differentiate instruction. Teachers are supported to develop their behavior management skills and relationships between adults and students are generally open and friendly. The 'bucks' system of rewards motivates students and they, and their parents, are aware that the staff are sensitive to the social development of each student as well as their academic progress.

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 is working towards balancing the range of experience within the staff group. However, first and foremost, he insists upon selecting staff who can fully support the school's culture and demonstrate a commitment to the use of data. This approach has been successful in recruiting a team of reflective and proactive practitioners. They are learning from and with each other and are open and willing to candidly evaluate

performance and practice in order to move the school forward. For example, the technology team observed each other and discussed the range of strategies that they had seen. Teachers are actively involved in evaluating the range of professional development opportunities. These arise from the needs identified by the ongoing analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. Each year, teachers identify a number of goals for their own professional development and these are calibrated with the principal in order to ensure that they provide appropriate individual challenge. Goals revolve around key school priorities, are organized under a number of headings such as 'engaging all students in learning', and staff are required to provide evidence sources to benchmark success with these. The principal returns to these goals as part of the ongoing dialogue about professional practice and performance when undertaking formal and informal classroom observation. Staff value the opportunity to receive feedback from a professional they respect. However, the school does not always use classroom observation as a means of generating qualitative data. An example would be using observation specifically to focus upon assessing how well whole school improvement strategies are being embedded within day to day practice and, thus, as a means of monitoring progress towards goals.

The principal has empowered staff and engaged their full commitment in order to build the strengths within his team. Colleagues perceive him to be a passionate and visionary leader whose door is always open to them. One commented that he 'energizes me'. The principal has the capacity to harness this energy to continue to take the school forward and realize the full impact upon student achievement. The school runs smoothly on a day to day basis and clear procedures underpin the principal's high expectations of staff accountability. The school uses a range of partnerships with outside organizations to enrich the opportunities offered to students. A valuable example of such a partner is 'Junior Achievement' who support the school's aims by providing instruction in financial literacy and personal economics.

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's use of the Comprehensive Education Plan as a strategic tool is proficient overall and represents a great deal of collaborative effort. However, goals are not always explicitly measurable. Action plans define the range of strategies to be undertaken to achieve each goal but do not provide a timeline of activities nor the specific milestones which will be used to check progress along the way. This means that the school is less likely to be able to assess whether all is on track towards completion and success. The school leadership team meets monthly and this provides for formal review of elements of the plan as the year progresses. A major strength of the principal's leadership is his ability to enable ongoing review of strategies and initiatives, to evaluate data and evidence of their success and to amend plans accordingly. The team structure and reporting procedures within the school mean that issues are discussed in a focused way. The school's development of more precise tools to collect and compare data and to illuminate the efficacy of plans can only prove useful in further enabling the timely revision and adaptation of strategies.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Laboratory School for Finance and Technology (MS223)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each student, classroom, grade level, 			X
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.			X
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	