



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy

Early Childhood Elementary School 236

**1871 Walton Avenue
Bronx
NY 10453**

Principal: Beverly Ellis

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Reviewer: Alvin Jeffs

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy comprises of Public School 236 and Public School 173 (the Annex). Together, they form an early childhood center (pre-kindergarten through grade 2) numbering 420 students. Of these a growing proportion, 19%, are special education students and 14% are English language learners. Over 60% of the students are Hispanic and nearly 40% are Black.

Students attending Public School 236 often come from farther afield than the immediate neighborhood within the North Bronx. All special education students are bussed into the schools.

Public School 236 houses seven classes from pre-kindergarten to grade 2. Five of these classes are inclusion classes comprising 60% general education and 40% special education students. It is supervised by the assistant principal. The newer Public School 173 was set up as a joint venture between the Board of Education and The Agency for Child Development. It is managed by the principal and houses 11 classes, of which three are inclusion and three bilingual. Eighty-four percent of students have Title 1 eligibility.

Although on the same site as the La Peninsula Head Start program, and many of the students graduate from there, current schedules make it difficult for the two organizations to work together.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students say that the school is a place that is safe, welcoming and celebrates achievement.
- Parents say that teachers “go the extra mile” with their children and discuss “where your child is and where to go next.”
- The principal is highly respected by everyone and is responsible for the excellent coherence and good practice across the two sites.
- Staff successfully plan activities for students with a wide range of achievements and many who experience complex learning difficulties.
- The school Cabinet ensures that the goals within the Comprehensive Education Plan are implemented uniformly throughout the school.
- All staff are highly committed to students achieving the highest possible standards.
- The school implements a broad curriculum and sustains an atmosphere of respect and enthusiasm that makes all students grow in self-worth.
- The school uses a wide range of relevant and useful data to keep individual student progress and grade developments under constant review.
- Imaginative portfolios of student work are developing well in English language arts and mathematics.
- An excellent program of professional development allows staff to keep up to date with many educational initiatives.

What the school needs to improve

- Seek appropriate comparisons with other schools to more effectively evaluate all aspects of performance and practice.
- Ensure that differentiation of all planning and teaching is brought up to the level of the best teachers in the school.
- Review communication with parents on the PS236 site and consider more support for parents for whom English is not their first language.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The fact that the two sites function as one and that all students receive a similarly high level of teaching and care is a great tribute to all staff involved. The principal leads a school which is extremely effective in providing a high quality service for students and parents alike.

The use of data and the reflective nature of all practices within the school means that evidence gained within the classroom and derived from teachers' excellent relations with parents combine to provide a sound basis for planning for students. The principal is keen to manage its large body of information well to promote effective planning for individual students and inform completion of grades within the school without collecting data for the sake of it. There is a focus on ensuring that staff make effective use of time in planning and case discussions

Careful scheduling and strategic use of staff and finance means that a very high degree of collaboration takes place between all staff. This, together with high quality professional development, results in all staff developing planning that focuses on individual students and groups, based on their attainments and the next step in their development.

The school is the first to admit that some developments are still 'work in progress', but this school continues to encourage teaching and procedures that are at the forefront of early childhood education.

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's effective use of data is a great strength. In all discussions within the school, senior staff and teachers are at pains to get the clearest picture of student achievement and progress. This relates to all aspects of school life including academic, behavior and attendance. It means that staff at grade level meetings can see patterns of development and at individual case conferences they can base recommendations on a wide range of formal and informal assessments undertaken by each student's teacher.

The effective data collection allows the principal and senior staff to monitor the development of each student, each grade as well as the work of the school. The wealth of data and the effectiveness of its interpretation allows the school to gain a very clear picture of attainment by gender, ethnicity and with regard to special educational difficulties. Impressively, the English coach is able to say that data indicates that students using graphic organizers in their writing achieve better than those who do not. Data also identifies inference as a weakness within reading and this has now become a focus for planning and teaching.

The use of data is not indiscriminate. The principal monitors it to ensure that only data that assists the school and its students to make progress continues to be processed. She is keen to maximize teachers' teaching and planning time by ensuring that data collection is adequate for key evaluations and redundant processes are removed.

The school has only just started to compare its work with that of other, similar, establishments and recognizes that it does not yet have any data that will assist in evaluating or revising programs.

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.

Staff see the value of data collection and its use as the basis for overall planning and individual student support. This is a key element of most teachers' work within the school. For example, a class teacher when asked to talk about an individual student is able to marshal a wide range of evidence, from the extremely useful Developmental Reading Assessment to examples of classroom work with annotations that indicate the profile of strengths and weaknesses within a piece of writing. The teacher is able to supplement this with a very detailed knowledge of the child as a learner, the home background and patterns of behavior and attendance. The classroom teacher for two grade 1 lower attaining students was, for example, able to present a very detailed picture of each, asking 'Why is this one progressing and this one not?'. Colleagues were able to contribute suggestions for the next steps to be taken, additional techniques to be tried and hypotheses for why progress varies.

Cabinet meetings are regularly held to examine a wide range of data from across year groups. Staff are able to quickly reach a number of conclusions, including the efficacy of existing programs and the need for new ones. At classroom level, data is increasingly used to group students on the basis of, for example, language skills, thereby making teaching more effective. It allows teachers to present a good selection of work and data for discussions with students and parents. Students say they are clear about where they are and what they should do next. For parents, the information the school provides is seen as valuable and many would like to see more opportunities for parent-teacher conferences each year. They recognize that teachers "...go the extra mile..." for their children and this, in turn, encourages them to implement suggestions the school makes. They would also like to ensure that parents receive all relevant information promptly and that parents for whom English is not their first language receive even more support to assist them in helping with homework.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity to and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

One of the reasons that parents and students indicate that coming to this school is exciting is that it offers a rich and varied curriculum. Despite the strong and effective emphasis on the core subjects there are many opportunities for students to excel in other areas such as music, art and gymnastics. There are good opportunities for interesting educational visits

to the zoo and the Museum of Transportation. In addition English receives a significant boost from activities such as book fairs and 'A Poem in Your Pocket'. However, not all teachers plan classroom instruction that is well enough matched to the different needs of students.

Significant work is put into ensuring the highest possible levels of attendance, with excellent follow-up of absence by the parent coordinator and the family support worker. However, the key factor is the good relationship between adult and student, exemplified by mutual respect, the willingness to discuss work and what to do next and a desire to make lessons as enjoyable as possible. Lessons are imaginative, develop very good independent skills in students and place a strong emphasis on self-help with the ability to present information and ideas to others. In addition to the success of lessons, the willingness of all staff to engage with students' concerns is recognized by parents and students alike. It contributes to a culture that is seen as safe, highly supportive and celebratory of student progress.

At a strategic level, funding is well used, for example to provide cover for staff attending important grade meetings. Scheduling has been synchronized to allow more common preparation times and, thus, more teamwork. In addition, care has been taken to ensure that new staff are well able to work in the school's open environment. The appointment of the family support worker is a recent and imaginative development that characterizes the coherence of the school's planning.

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 commitment to high achievement and to the effective use of observational and test data is very strong within the senior staff and through them it permeates the school. Coaches model work and senior staff observes teaching with these matters in mind. Gradually the principal has noticed a distinct change of emphasis towards evidence-based planning within teacher and grade discussions. This is a positive move and one that was apparent throughout the quality review process.

Staff have developed good teamwork practices for a wide range of issues from case discussions to grade level curriculum planning. The strength here is that all meetings draw from staff across both sites, contributing to practice and implementation that is remarkably consistent.

Professional development is varied and of a high quality. Staff say that they are able to attend training within and beyond the school. This training is supportive both of their classroom practice and individual professional development. External consultants have been engaged who have been invaluable in assessing students' work and identifying areas for development. Writing schemes of work in conjunction with the Teachers' College and wide participation in regional calendar days have been very beneficial to staff. The quality of professional development provided by the school coaches is very high. It combines the latest external and internal research with practical suggestions for implementation. This quality and practicality contributes well to the take-up of many of the suggestions and continuance of good classroom practice.

Central to all of this is the work of the principal. An exceptional practitioner, she combines an encyclopedic knowledge of early education with a sensitivity to staff, students and

families. She models all of the practices that have been so successful within the school. Procedures within the school work smoothly. She and colleagues undertake observations that staff find helpful. Not least of all, she is aware that all initiatives need to benefit the student and this leads to very effective use of time. It also gains appropriately high respect from everyone involved in the 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 proficient.

The school has a Comprehensive Education Plan that is impressive in its detail. Above all it is very clear about where data suggests the work of the school should go. It identifies clear and meaningful targets and assigns responsibilities to staff against clear timelines although not enough attention is paid to success criteria so that staff can be clear when goals have been achieved. It is also a plan that is costed, with resource issues and financial implications being clearly spelled out at the start of the year.

The process by which the targets are developed is an effective one. Planning indicates that during the spring, previous targets will be reviewed and teachers asked to assess the effectiveness of existing programs. Data on students is collected and collated electronically. The School Development Plan is compiled by the literacy coach which ensures that it is uniformly coherent. The draft plan is considered by the school leadership team and the cabinet, and is published after their amendments. The success of the new targets or the need for new developments then become the regular consideration of both cabinet and school leadership team. This process uses data in a very focused and effective way to assess how it will benefit students. By involving all staff it reflects all of the processes within the school which make it such a successful and inspiring organization.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy (CES 236)	∅	✓	+
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	