



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The New School for Leadership and Journalism

**Middle School 244
120 West 231 Street
Bronx
NY 10463**

Principal: Dolores Peterson

Dates of review: March 5 - 6, 2007

Reviewer: Denis Pittman

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The New School for Leadership and Journalism is in its second year, now servicing students in grades 6, 7 and 8. The school currently has 695 students on its register but, this number fluctuates frequently as a result of a high number of immigrant students from the Dominican Republic, Mexico and South America who are currently in transition. The ethnic composition of the school consists of 78% of students who are of Hispanic origin with almost half of those students identified as English language learners; 16% Black, 5% Asian and 1% white. Overall, 28.5% of students identified as English language learners currently receive English as a second language support. There are 10% special education students. Student attendance is at 91.2%. In comparison with other middle schools with similar populations this is a better than average attendance rate but below that of New York City schools as a whole. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The school receives new entrants at both 6th and 7th grade level. The challenge for the school is to phase these new students into the school culture and expectations as quickly as possible in order to prepare them for State tests which take place within four months of their arrival.

The organization of the school has an innovative feature. A high proportion of lessons are taught as single sex classes.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is very effectively led by the principal who has created a good team climate in the school.
- The school has built very positive relationships with students and families, which is creating a firm commitment to school values.
- The school has created a safe, supportive environment where students are willing to learn.
- The school has established a positive working partnership with business and the local community.
- An extensive range of professional development opportunities is provided for staff to enhance their teaching expertise in order to rise to new challenges.
- The school has established effective administrative and communication procedures that enhance the work of the school and create an efficient smoothly running establishment.
- Staff are effectively involved in curriculum decisions related to school development planning.

What the school needs to improve

- Use the data gathered on individual students to extend the range of comparisons made of the performance of groups of students.
- Continue to improve the quality, consistency and use of data collected in relation to the progress of special education students.
- Develop assessment procedures for English language learners that identify and address information about language acquisition and academic need.
- Provide teachers with training in using data analysis to inform planning which best support the needs of each student, particularly through differentiated instruction.
- Ensure that goals are measurable, with interim milestones against which to assess progress accurately.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The school is laying firm foundations for its future success. The leadership of the school has established a clear direction for its ongoing development. Staff, students and parents are committed to these objectives. Relationships within the school are positive and supportive. Students have shown by their improving attendance that they enjoy being at the school. The curriculum is being appropriately developed and modified to meet the diverse student needs. The extra-curricular dimension, in terms of the support and additional programs it provides for students, is particularly good. Staff are hard-working and are committed to improving their professional practices. The positive climate for improvement that exists within the school energizes its activities. The school has shown that even at this early stage it has the capacity to build and sustain the changes it has already successfully made.

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 accesses and generates significant amounts of objective data that enables it to analyze information on a student, classroom and grade level basis. For example, the school has identified that a high proportion of its students are below grade level in both mathematics and English language and arts. The school is using this information strategically to address the needs of special education students in order to exceed each individual education plan's grade level expectations. In this context, the school has identified a need to provide a secure knowledge of formative assessment of the progress of this group of students.

In the general education program, teachers are developing portfolios of work to show ongoing assessment outcomes. The school has a broad profile of the performance of students based on ethnicity but it is not analyzed sufficiently. However, data that is being collected in relation to the performance of single sex classes is analyzed in a variety of ways. Currently, the data indicates that literacy skills of girls are significantly higher than boys. The school is making good use of this information to focus on providing appropriate texts for boys as well as looking at class interaction to engage boys more effectively in activities.

The identification of special education students is an important school focus, particularly for those students who also have a lack of facility in English. The school is using its assessment procedures well to differentiate the support that needs to be given for these two categories of students. Additional aspects of formative assessment are adequately collected through conferencing activities, tests and interviews with parents.

In a broader context, given the early stage of the school's development, the comparison of data related to similar schools is difficult, particularly in respect to the fact that there are very few schools that reflect its characteristics. Similarly, the school has very limited evidence to identify any significant trends in its own past performance. The school has the capacity to analyze these once the data is established.

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 school has established a collaborative process, involving staff and parents, to determine its Comprehensive Education Plan. The school then evaluates its interim performance through individual staff interviews based on a mid-term reflection document. The goals identified include developing critical reading and writing skills, improving differentiation of teaching, improving assessments in relation to English language arts and special education students and providing enrichment opportunities for students. These issues are a clear reflection of the data that the school has collected and continues to generate. The school is effectively focusing its resources on those areas where it could have an immediate impact. For example, the provision of the Enrichment Zone, at the start of the day, is addressing students’ writing levels.

The school has effectively implemented a specific program that provides more detailed diagnostic assessments as part of the focus on special education students. The quality of individual education plans and their use is improving but remains a focus for development. The school recognizes the need to improve the instruction and learning for the English language learners through assessments and a curriculum designed specifically to meet their needs. The school is at an interim stage in developing a suitable comprehensive assessment interview to provide enough information to place and support students appropriately.

The school conveys its high expectations of students very effectively through formal newsletters to parents and students and through assemblies that reflect merit and achievement. In this context, the introduction and promotion of the Junior Cadet Program exemplifies the characteristics of discipline and leadership that are core aspects of the school's mission. The drive to improve performance is reflected in sustained attendance and continuing participation in extended-day programs and the Saturday Academy. The school strenuously encourages parents to support its strategies for improvement and to become active partners in their children's education. The school provides a number of parental workshops not only to give support to them but also to confirm the message of shared involvement and commitment.

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.

The curriculum is appropriately aligned with mandated requirements. For example, the balanced literacy program utilizes the region's curriculum for reading and writing with

additional units to support the school's objectives. Teachers are proficient at using authentic writing activities to complement the wider curriculum. The school has effectively created a template for departmental unit planning which includes the components of a quality curriculum. This practice provides the basis for achieving consistency in overall curriculum planning. The school has also been innovative in implementing a science program that covers life, physical and earth science in the same curriculum year. Students are motivated and interested in these classes.

Staff have shown their commitment to improve their teaching and the progress of students. A good example is the positive way they have embraced and implemented the Enrichment Zone period. All staff are involved in providing support for students in relation to their mathematics or English language needs. The use of data to underpin differentiation and promote effective instructional programs is not yet consistent practice, and is recognized as an area for continuing development. Expertise that exists within the school is being shared to good effect through professional development activities.

The budget is used effectively to promote the school's objectives. This is shown through the significant amount of professional development and the specialized programs that have been purchased to address students' needs. Appropriate scheduling decisions reflect a clear commitment to goals of the school.

Data shows that the single sex classes are successful in promoting an active involvement of students in their learning. The level and extent of oral contribution in lessons is focused and detailed, reflecting the specific interests of the separate gender groups. These patterns of work are promoting very positive relationships between students and staff. Students are keen to acknowledge the support and interest which staff show in their well-being and their academic progress. They value the safe environment in which they learn. The evidence of this enjoyment is shown in the improved attendance levels that have been achieved by the school. The incidence of cutting classes is also reducing. The importance of regular attendance and punctuality is given a very high priority.

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 proficient.

The principal has demonstrated through good quality documentation and meetings with staff, students, and parents, her firm commitment to high expectations of performance. The organizational framework of the school clearly delineates accountabilities and expertise. The leadership team has regular meetings that focus on the use of data to inform decision-making. The principal has identified stringent criteria for selection of staff based on a clear commitment to the school's values. The significant amount of additional work undertaken by the staff is clear evidence of that commitment in practice.

The use of data is modeled for other staff to help them improve their skills of data analysis and enable staff to amend their teaching programs in line with this information. These meetings are an adjunct of the very effective professional development activities that take place in the school. There is a clear strategy for professional development which is being implemented. The central themes are concerned with raising achievement, improving the quality of teaching and enhancing the learning opportunities of students. The principal and senior staff regularly visit classes to evaluate the outcomes of this professional development focus. The school has a detailed schedule of informal and formal

observations. Staff confirmed that the feedback from these observations is informative and valuable. The incidence of a mid-year goal-setting interview for all staff is another example of the very effective way in which the school identifies professional development issues. The school has a large number of new staff, whom it supports well.

The principal is very well respected by staff, students and parents. She is a significant catalyst for improvement in the school. Her clear vision for the school is backed up by effective leadership and the ability to create a supportive team culture amongst the staff. The school is effectively administered and it runs smoothly. Procedures are clear with effective communications systems. This aspect of promoting clear lines of communication is shown in the good partnerships that have been established with the local community. The school exemplifies its commitment to the community through its involvement in a significant number of charity walks and support for the work of the Veterans Hospital. The school has developed valuable links with business related to journalism and with Fordham University.

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 effectively evaluates its long- and short-term goals in relation to students' needs and progress. School leaders have a regular schedule of meetings to identify ongoing issues connected with student progress. For example, the outcomes of reviews of instructional programs and in particular the effectiveness of specific teachers become the focus of intervention strategies across the school. The mid-year interviews with teachers are used as a measure of the effectiveness of the school's work. The regular reporting cycles provide effective evidence of student progress and where interventions may need to be made to address issues of low achievement or slow progress. For example, the comparison of the outcomes of the first marking period compared with the second showed variations in the passing levels within grades. The follow-up indicated that staff were using the second marking period as a wake-up call and also had increased the standard of work needed in order to meet increased expectations.

The use of data as a diagnostic tool in relation to individual students is becoming well established but what is not so firmly embedded is the use of data in a diagnostic way to identify trends of performance in specific cohorts or groups of students. It is this aspect that the school is looking to develop, through its collaborative meetings and professional development. The provision of the Enrichment Zone activities is initial evidence of how the school is using data to identify issues for specific cohorts. The school has shown its ability to be adaptable in its curriculum planning by the changes that it has implemented in relation to its science provision. Staff have a clear perception of the goals and core purpose of the school. The evidence of this is shown in the commitment made to extended-day activities, the Saturday Academy and field trips. All of these indicate a strong commitment to the specific needs of students.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: New School of Leadership and Journalism (MS 244)	∅	✓	+
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	