



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Luisa Dessus Cruz Middle School

Middle School 302

**681 Kelly Street
Bronx
NY 10455**

Principal: Angel Rodriguez

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Reviewer: David Tobin

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Luisa Dessus Cruz, Middle School 302, is a grade 6 through 8 school with 920 students. A little more than three-quarters of the school population is Hispanic and almost a quarter are Black. Special education students account for approximately 17% of the school population and receive the full continuum of support services. There is a similar percentage of students designated as English language learners with Spanish as the dominant language. These students receive English as a second language or bi-lingual class support. A large proportion of students have experienced significant interruptions to their formal education. In the current school year, 25 students have been held over in grade 5.

In September 2006, Middle School 302 revised its organizational structure and adopted a model of three themed vertical academies to replicate small school structures with the intention of building trusting relationships between students, parents and teachers.

Patterns of school attendance over the last three years have been superior to that of similar schools and are close to the average for City-wide schools. The school is Title 1 eligible.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and assistant principals provide strong leadership and exemplify the drive and determination required to achieve the school's goal of high standards for all students.
- The school's extensive use of data not only informs instructional decision-making but enables intervention programs to be fine-tuned to the rate of progress of individual students.
- Teachers' professional development is aligned closely with the school's own institutional priorities.
- The early identification of at-risk students is proving effective, leading to support for such students via appropriate intervention programs.
- The well-defined, inter-connecting roles of assistant principals, deans and classroom teachers and their close collaboration have made a significant contribution to school effective discipline and the management of student behavior.
- Displays in classrooms and hallways not only celebrate students' achievements but reveal the use of helpful feedback on their work.
- The school has invested considerable resources in multi-media technology to support and enhance teaching and learning and in the training of teachers to use technology effectively.
- The involvement of teachers of special education students and English language learners in common planning meetings and grade level meetings with their general education colleagues has ensured that their lessons address grade-level standards and student interests.
- A well conceived strategy has been formulated recently to encourage the active involvement of parents throughout the school year.

What the school needs to improve

- Investigate further the reasons for the variability in the performance of some groups of students and devise a strategy that will focus resources on reducing those pockets of under-achievement.
- Evaluate systematically the professional development opportunities available to all staff and confirm through evaluation and feedback that they make well-judged, appropriate responses to these to enhance their own professional development.
- Examine the emphasis given to music within the academy structure and review how the school might draw on expertise within the wider community to develop the students' competence in performance, composition, listening and appraisal.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school.

Middle School 302 is an effective school with a welcoming culture and high expectations for all its students. The principal and four assistant principals provide strong leadership. Three of four assistant principals each assume responsibility for one of the academies and a fourth assumes responsibility for special education students.

Common planning by teachers is achieving greater consistency in the manner in which lessons are prepared, delivered and evaluated. The students' behavior both in classrooms and around the school is mature and movement at transitions is orderly. This is due, in no small measure, to the vigilance of senior staff and in particular, to the work of the deans.

Apart from the achievements of grade 8 students in English language arts, standards have risen over the last few years. Attendance figures approach the City average and suspensions are rare. The school is data rich and its slogan "No level 1's and level 2's just won't do" reflect the commitment of staff to improving standards year-on-year.

Professional development has been the cornerstone of the school's initiative to drive up standards. Teachers are more confident in monitoring and analyzing data. In turn, this enhances instruction in that planning is matched to students' needs and teachers provide incisive comments in written and oral feedback to students. The active involvement of parents remains an elusive goal but a new set of strategies are now in place that are designed to be attractive to those school parents who hitherto have been out of reach.

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well developed

Data gathering has enabled the school to point confidently to improvements in student performance year-on-year. The school's extensive use of data derived from a wide range of sources not only informs instructional decision-making but enables intervention programs to be fine-tuned to the rate of progress of individual students, groups and cohorts. Such data is put to good use. For example, new students, struggling with the demands of work in grade 6, have been identified and provided with a set of learning opportunities designed to facilitate their speedy transfer back into regular classes. Elsewhere, data analysis pinpoints which groups or individuals have the poorest records of attendance, how factors such as gender may be influencing school performance and which aspects of the curriculum must yield improved student performance.

Members of the cabinet scrutinize data for each subject, cohort and group, as well as for individuals. The school is able to point with some pride to its attendance figures as they now come close to the City average for all schools. Year-on-year analyses point to dramatic decreases in the percentages of students who only manage to gain level 1 in English language arts and mathematics over the last four years. To make the point, more

than a third of students gained only level 1 four years ago; last year the proportion had been reduced to a fifth or less.

Analysis of data leads promptly to action. The cabinet now needs to ensure that its self-evaluation arrangements provide accurate, verifiable judgements of the true state of affairs.

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 well developed.

Teachers within each academy possess a good working knowledge of their students’ academic achievements and personal development and are becoming more adept at analyzing and interpreting statistical data. Increasing use is being made of skills analysis to identify a student’s areas of competence and weakness. For example, a reading analysis revealed that students’ weakest areas lay in analyzing a point of view, recalling details and identifying sequences. This enabled teachers to focus on specific target areas and identify the next learning steps without having to cover other competencies already mastered by student.

Displays in classrooms and hallways not only celebrate students’ achievements but reveal the use of critically constructive marking, the requirements of set tasks and the valuable information about the standards that students are expected to achieve.

The academic intervention services’ tracking log identifies all students whose progress and performance gives cause for concern. It identifies also those higher achieving students who need to maintain and improve their high scores. Differentiated instruction is available during the extended day and on Saturdays for both groups. Grade 6 students who scored at level 1 are offered a personal intervention plan involving three-monthly reviews of progress to ensure that academic intervention is proving effective.

A well-conceived strategy has been formulated to encourage the more active involvement of parents throughout the school year. Features include the use of flyers, invitations to monthly conferences, requests for participation in a parent involvement committee and the provision of parental workshops by the parent coordinator. Nevertheless, attempts still need to be made to tackle the confusion that parents experience when confronted with conflicting accounts of the school’s performance and standing.

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 school follows the mandated curriculum and curriculum mapping reflects this. Conscious of the need to improve achievement in English language arts, the school has devised a system for teachers to share common planning time and to consider jointly how the balanced literacy approach will improve students reading and writing skills. The school’s academy structure places a strong emphasis on balanced literacy, mathematics,

science, social studies, technology, arts and physical education. However, the neighborhood's thriving musical culture is not easily represented in the vertical academy structure. One issue facing the school is how best to tap into the learning opportunities available within the community to develop students' skills in performance, composition, listening and appraisal.

A variety of instruction methods seek to capture and sustain the students' interests. These include practical demonstrations, whole class, small group and individual work in which students are encouraged regularly to refer to the rubrics displayed in classrooms to inform their work. The budgetary decision to invest in technology resources, including the use of interactive whiteboards, is an example of awareness of student need being taken into consideration in decision-making. It is having a positive impact on students' learning, notably with regard to focusing their attention and challenging their understanding.

The best lessons begin by explaining the lesson's purpose and conclude with purposeful questioning that probes the students' understanding. Record-keeping indicates where specific students have struggled or excelled and which concepts will need to be re-visited. Regular encouragement is given to students to expand their writing, making use of 'powerful' words that capture the writer's intention. Data collected regarding students' reading competence, for instance, pinpointed which sub-skills are weakest within the student population and provided a useful base for making informed adjustments to instruction. As a result, teachers are well-positioned to identify students who may be pushed up a level.

Grade and faculty meetings involve teachers of special education students and English language learners and their general education colleagues in common planning, thereby ensuring that lessons address grade-level standards and student interests. These meetings place a strong emphasis on teams of teachers examining student progress and performance from a range of sources and data bases. Collaborative work enables teachers to plan jointly and gain experience from other colleagues about how best to plan teaching and learning.

Attendance is marginally below the average achieved by all City schools and determined efforts are made to monitor and report attendance figures on a daily basis. Attendance figures are displayed prominently on corridors and absences are followed up speedily with parents.

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 and four assistant principals provide strong leadership and exemplify the drive and determination required to achieve the school's goal of high standards for all students. The well-defined, inter-connecting roles of assistant principals, deans and classroom teachers and their close collaboration have made a significant contribution to effective school discipline and the management of student behavior

Teachers are appointed who have the capacity to embrace the school's culture of openness and mutual support. The principal checks carefully all applications for teaching posts and account is taken of how well a candidate relates to staff and students during the

school visit. Thereafter, the principal and assistant principals conduct lesson observations for each teacher on at least an annual basis and provide effective feedback.

The school has a strong commitment to continuing professional development with coaches, lead teachers, mentors and external consultants working with colleagues to enhance teacher expertise and the quality of teaching and learning. Literacy and mathematics coaches provide valuable support and further professional development to their colleagues. However, not all teachers make well-judged, appropriate responses to the opportunities presented to them to enhance their own professional development. The extended use of “push in” and “pull out” instruction is proving to be particularly effective in ensuring that special education teachers and classteachers collaborate to deepen their knowledge of differentiation within the curriculum. The school is at an early stage in evaluating systematically the professional development opportunities available to all staff working to achieve the school’s declared objectives. The school has invested considerable resource not only in the purchase of multi-media technology to support and enhance teaching and learning but also in the training of teachers to use technology effectively. The impact of this initiative now needs to be evaluated.

The school runs smoothly and efficiently. Routines are well established and are known and understood by staff and students. Where a flashpoint does occur and a student loses self-control, staff are skilled in defusing such situations. Extra-curricular activities include Sport and Arts in School Foundation and Saturday School to help prepare students for the school’s testing program. Overall, the climate of mutual respect promotes the self-confidence and self-belief of pupils with a diverse range of needs.

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 with several well developed features.

Systems are in place enabling the school to gain an accurate view of what it does well and what areas continue to require improvement. The executive summary of the Comprehensive Education Plan draws on data to provide an accurate, succinct overview of the school’s educational program and the school-wide priorities for improvement in 2006-07. Reference is made to a commitment to improving reading and writing proficiency of all students, including the early identification of at-risk students. A strategy has been devised to address this issue. This includes the use of tracking logs, intervention plans and collaborative work with parents as the means for effecting improvement.

The summary gives also a high priority to the formulation of a corrective action plan to promote the progress and performance of English language learners and special education students. However, there remains the need to investigate further the reasons for the variability in the performance of some groups students together with an estimate of likely resource implications if those pockets of under-achievement, revealed via the data analysis, are to be reduced further.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Luisa Dessus Crus Middle School (MS 302)	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	X
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	