



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Early Childhood Lab School

Public School 304

**Lafayette Avenue
Bronx
NY 10465**

Principal: Joseph J Nobile

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Reviewer: Cherry Jackson

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Early Childhood Lab School serves an ethnically diverse community in the Bronx. Currently there are 432 students in grades kindergarten - 5. 44 % of the students are Hispanic, 36% are White, and 17% are Black. Last year there were 71% students eligible for Title 1 funding, which was close to the City average.

This year there are 6 English language learners and about 20% of students, who require special education. The students' rate of attendance last year was 94%.

The school is housed in a building with two others, one for a middle school magnet and one for students with severe disabilities. They co-operate and collaborate. Public School 304 was created as a 'lab' school dedicated to professional development for all teachers. They provide workshops for other teachers to support best practice, as well as attending courses themselves.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Test results are rising from year to year in Literacy and mathematics.
- The teachers produce thorough and useful data from their lessons, particularly about the students' reading and writing skills.
- The well organized curriculum maps for Literacy include cross curricular science and social studies and support the teaching very well.
- High expectations are thoughtfully conveyed to the students via articulation and displays.
- Qualitative provision for the teachers' professional development is clearly impacting on students' progress.
- Observation and evaluation of the teaching ensure that it is good and identifies next steps.
- Collaborative working of all the staff and especially the principal and assistant principal is focused on students' achievement.
- The students like their school, their principal and teachers and appreciate their learning.
- Links with other schools on the same site bring enrichment for Public School 304 students.
- The parents like their school and are particularly impressed with the reading program.

What the school needs to improve

- Although the staff is very sensitive to individual need, the school does not systematically collect data for different groups within the school community.
- The school compares its results with neighborhood and regional schools but not with the statistically similar group within the City.
- The students know very well the subject of their lessons each day but are not able to say what their next learning target is.
- The mandated Everyday Math curriculum needs to be enhanced to the same level as the balanced Literacy program.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school.

The school is collaboratively led by the principal and his assistant principal, ably supported by the committed leadership team and an enthusiastic, analytical group of teachers. The school's links with two teachers' colleges and the quality of the professional development give it strength, particularly in literacy, the curriculum and teaching.

Attention to curriculum maps and to ensuring differentiation for the students has been raising the test scores over the last few years. This is well supported by the good number of adults who work with the students and frequently break up the classes into appropriate learning groups.

The school uses data effectively to evaluate its own performance. The principal has identified important necessary developments, for example, in mathematics, from test results. More attention would be useful to identify what test data can show about groups within the school community.

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 takes data seriously. The principal analyzes test results as soon as they are received. He looks at year to year fluctuations and can show a steady rise in both literacy and mathematics scores over the last few years. He compares whole school results with those of neighborhood and regional schools but not with the statistically similar group of schools across the City. In fact, Public School 304 usually outperforms its group and is aware of its ranking within the district, region and city. However, the school does not compare these results for further evaluation.

Dissemination of the principal's findings is swift and comprehensive. The school cabinet and Tier III committee members appropriately discuss the outcomes and make recommendations to present to staff. Leadership members then meet the teachers to discuss results and map out intervention strategies for classes, groups, and individuals. Data is the foundation for discussion at grade meetings.

The range of data is good. The teachers all keep a good range of information about what their students can do, that they generate during lessons. The thorough detail that they record for literacy is good. They are frequently to be seen in their classrooms working with a group of students and simultaneously making evaluations for individuals against their lesson objectives. They report that conferencing, for literacy and mathematics, gives them the most useful data. Portfolios help them to moderate their data to make it more objective and the principal wants to develop this aspect further. To all this they add the test results and information, for example, from Academic Intervention Services' reports, to create a complete picture for their class.

The English Language Learner coordinator assesses the progress made by the English language learners. The great proportion of the special education students are assessed by the Academic Intervention Services coordinator. The coordinators articulate via discussions with the class teachers. Groups of students of particular interest to the school are those who are just into a level and not yet secure there. They are carefully identified and monitored.

The ethnic groups in the school vary in size so are hard to compare. No systematic comparisons are made so there may be undiagnosed strengths or weaknesses in their achievement. The principal is right when he identifies another focus, on the more able pupils, for the future. This would be another group for whom data needs to be collected and studied.

The impact of the data analyses on individual student achievement is good because it facilitates detailed planning to meet needs.

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.

Everyone in the school community is working to improve the students’ progress.

The school leadership team collaborates appropriately to set useful, quantifiable goals for student achievement on the Comprehensive Education Plan. They build improvement and challenge into the goals year to year. The goals are helpful for both academic and creative subjects. Thorough plans then support these goals.

Goals are clear. The state test data identifies students who need to be in intervention groups, and whose further assessments are regularly reviewed. The students who might slip back are carefully planned for and monitored. Class teachers plan for individuals who are often put into small groups with common needs which change as the term goes on. The class teachers’ plans are particularly well related to needs because they collect so much information during lessons about what students can or cannot manage.

Planning for special education students is thorough. The school seeks to meet their needs with a range of programs and software and is flexible to change strategies if this seems best. Test results for this group have risen well between 2002 and 2005.

Communicating the school’s expectation to the parents can be difficult as many are busy working people. However, the school surveys parents about their needs and provides an attractive and interesting range of talks, workshops and even family trips. They offer workshops twice for the convenience of parents with commitments. Parents recall when their advice has been sought, helpfully, about their children, so that they know they are valued.

Students are fortunate in the way their teachers share rubrics with them so they know exactly what is expected from them in each lesson. The teachers have worked hard to align the rubrics with the common standards. Due to this effort the students know what they are learning in their lessons. However, they are not able to say, away from their

lessons, what they need to master next. Since the teachers are clearly defining this information, it would be a simple step to pass it on to students and parents in the form of targets, as the principal has identified.

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 mandated curriculum is well organized, particularly for Literacy. The teachers and literacy coach have worked hard with their Collaborative Community partners at Columbia to produce detailed and powerful curriculum maps which show the themes, skills and strategies which support high expectations; and the essential questions which give the teachers support when they are evaluating students’ progress. The school is successfully using a published program in mathematics which contains useful assessment strategies, and the mathematics coach and principal plan to develop the school’s use of this even further.

The teachers differentiate well for individual students by assessing accurately and teaching to meet identified needs. This is because they have had this aspect as a focus for two years. They successfully work with a specific group leaving the rest of the class to complete a task. Additional adults, including the senior managers, work in the classrooms or pull out so that there can be two or three adults working with different groups simultaneously within a class. This all works well, partly due to the strength of grade conferences where it is planned, and the coaches and assistant principal who stimulate and support teachers.

The principal and assistant principal, by being positive and clear, ensure that teachers take their responsibility for their students’ progress very seriously. They usefully make shared prep times for the teachers to allow them to help each other to plan.

The principal and assistant principal use the budget, staffing and schedule very efficiently to respond to what the data tells them. For example, in 2005 the mathematics results were lower than the previous year. The school budgeted for an additional AIS support teacher for mathematics, emphasized the subject in the teaching schedule, and improved the test results the next year.

Teaching materials are another spending priority after staffing. As a result the school is particularly well equipped with suitable books for various needs which are graded and stored for swift, easy use. This provides good support to the teachers.

The students are secure at school and trust the adults there to care about them. They rise well to the school’s high expectations and behave very well. They are enthusiastic about their lessons and said that they are learning “24/7”. Their attendance rate has risen over recent years. The teachers are very aware of attendance issues. These are followed up quickly, and the school offers rewards, which are clearly effective.

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.

Parents, teachers and pupils all agree that the daily running of the school is smooth. Time is well used and everyone fulfills their roles.

The principal successfully selects new staff by interview, with parents and teachers. They look for good team workers who understand the school's high expectation for students and staff, which usefully includes using data. The teachers' professional development is very carefully planned by the leadership team to further the school's aims. A great deal of very good training, particularly on the use of assessment and data, takes place inside the school as coaches work with the teachers or teachers collaborate. The school's links with Columbia University, especially the writing project, and Lehman College, are especially rich in development for teachers and are steadily improving classroom practice and helping to raise achievement.

The effectiveness of the principal and assistant principal is demonstrated by the improvement in test results over recent years. The staff and parents speak respectfully of them and the teachers say "the school steers us".

The assistant principal has a responsibility to observe teaching, walk through classes and to meet with teachers to set goals and discuss them regularly. She often follows up her comments with a swift note. She and the principal know the teachers' strengths and professional needs well. The work of coaches and professional development activities are planned to meet them. The principal or assistant principal carefully carry out the mandatory lesson observations for new teachers. Staff feel well prepared for and valued by the process.

The teachers have plentiful opportunity to watch others teach through the Columbia College collaboration and can see demonstration lessons from their own coaches too. Frequent lab site visits help them to value each other and to evaluate the outcome of their work very regularly.

The school integrates other support services from outside into the effort everyone is making for the students. There are several other staff developers who provide creative arts demonstrations in school. Public School 304 shares its site with two other schools. They all share a well equipped library. The Magnet School MS 101 helpfully provides student tutors from time to time for the younger students at Public School 304, while students from the other school, for severe physical, learning and emotional difficulties, work in the classes at Public School 304 when they are learning to enter a mainstream environment. They provide a valuable opportunity for the students to offer care and respect for others.

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 well developed.

Evaluation of success is robust and begins in the classrooms where teachers maintain their checklists and their valuable conference notes about individuals. From the coaches and the test data, more formal information is gathered.

Comparisons are made within the classes and grades. A range of diagnostic tests are used for collecting more information, as appropriate.

The information moves up the structure of the school to allow the leadership team to take oversight of how each student, grade and the whole school is doing. The information

gathered is used as part of the regular review of the Comprehensive Education Plan. Plans are realigned when necessary, and practices and resources are tailored to priorities. Within the scheduled cycle of meetings, goals and next steps are determined for the whole school and individuals. Goals are less clear for groups for whom data is not evaluated, as discussed above. Next steps are frequently modified in the rich discussions between class teachers and senior managers.

These procedures are working well for the school, identifying needs throughout the year, targeting and raising achievement. The students achieving lower grades are reducing and the special education students are achieving better.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Early Childhood Lab School (PS 304)	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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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