



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Pablo Neruda Academy

High School 305

**1980 Lafayette Avenue
Bronx
NY 10473**

Principal: Dina Heisler

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Reviewer: Clive Parsons

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Pablo Neruda Academy is a small high school catering for 347 students. It is in its fourth year and its third at the present location, which it shares with five other schools. Approximately 14% of students are English language learners and just over 20% are special education students. The school receives Title 1 funding. Seventy two percent of students are Hispanic, while 25% are Black and 3% are Asian or from other ethnic backgrounds. Over two thirds of students are male. Attendance is currently at 76.7%, which is below that in similar schools and well below that in schools across the City. Pablo Neruda is an Empowerment school.

As an Empowerment school it has more flexibility to make key decisions and control its resources for its school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal ensures that the school remains true to the original vision as it grows and enables its first cohort of students to graduate.
- There are some good examples where learning is accessible, engaging and interesting for students.
- Students appreciate the opportunities offered through internships to experience real-life situations.
- Students appreciate the electives and other courses offered that are relevant and personally useful.
- Students and their families believe that the school does all that it can to help them to succeed and will not allow them to fail.
- Parents feel that the school communicates well with them, makes them welcome and encourages them to become partners in the education of their children.
- The school collects a suitable range of data and uses it to ask questions and to increasingly direct its work.
- The principal disperses leadership and builds the capacity of individual staff, so that they are developing alongside students.
- The strong recent focus on attendance is having an impact so that attendance is rising.
- The administration and coaches support and enable teachers to make significant improvements to their classroom practice.

What the school needs to improve

- Identify the 'bottom lines' that are necessary to support the school's vision, develop systems and structures to ensure their success and refine them year-on-year.
- Use data more effectively to differentiate instruction, so that students learn more and make better progress.
- Continue to make interim and ongoing assessments more reliable, together with the use of specific rubrics and consistent grading policies.
- Increase further the accountability of staff to ensure that they more consistently meet the expectations and requirements of the school.
- Continue to review and develop the curriculum in order to engage all students and reduce the high proportion of students failing courses.
- Use data more constructively to identify patterns, including those developing over time, and to understand the performance of specific students in greater depth.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Pablo Neruda Academy has faced many challenges since it was established four years ago. The move to its present location after the first year resulted in a significant loss of students and staff. This set back required new relationships to be forged in a new environment during the second year. The influx of new staff remains high as the school has continued to grow. The administration has consequently found it difficult to build and sustain a collective memory of most effective practice. This remains the most challenging issue, but the principal's initial evaluation is pointing to greater stability for the year ahead as the school now has its full complement of grades. The accommodation available to the school continues to present challenges such as using science laboratories for mathematics and English classes. Nevertheless, the school is enabling its first cohort of students to graduate, despite the significant barriers over its comparatively short life time.

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 effectively tracks the progress of individual students towards meeting graduation requirements. This process enables an ongoing evaluation of student performance and progress in different subject areas, and as an overall cohort. It also enables the school to monitor the performance of specific groups of students, including English language learners and special education students. Given the high proportion of boys, the school is rightly concerned to track progress by gender. The school's progress report is used to identify performance gaps between other students, such as between different ethnic groups. The school is less well focused on exploring potential variations in some of these groups from the ongoing data that teachers generate. The principal is also aware that a more evaluative use of its own data will enable the school to identify more accurately which students are failing to make the expected progress, are not attending or are consistently late. Nevertheless, the school collects an appropriate range of data, is using it to compare performance, to raise questions and to increasingly direct its work.

The school is developing a diagnostic assessment tool to track progress in students' writing skills. Much attention is paid to ensure that individual teachers understand and can use the associated rubrics so that there is a consistent interpretation and therefore more reliable outcomes. Generic rubrics are also in use to guide the assessment in other content areas. The school places much emphasis on the production of portfolios. Within classes, teachers use a variety of ongoing tools to assess student progress, in line with the school's grading policy. There remains too much inconsistency in the use and interpretation of these policies, which, in part, leads to variations in credit accumulation for students across subjects.

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.

Teachers generate self-selected goals at the start of the year, which are reviewed as part of the formal classroom observation process. As yet, this process does not draw upon a review of achievement data for each teacher’s classes in order to reinforce their accountability. Plans are also established for specific areas of the school’s work. These have been identified in response to data or other evaluative measures. For example, detailed plans and goals have been established for each grade 12 student in order to maximise their potential for graduation. A specific plan is underway to develop and implement an overarching assessment program. Plans have also been established to ensure that the school better caters for the needs of the high proportion of male students, for example through an all male advisory. In addition, staff groups and committees have been established to provide opportunities for collaborative planning and decision making. Nevertheless not all plans and goals are fully developed with timeframes, staff responsibilities and specific, measurable goals.

Data, together with the school’s broader knowledge of students, are used to identify individual and groups of students who are most in need of improvement. Mandated and voluntary interventions are then targeted appropriately. Students and their families recognise the high expectations that the school has for them. They believe that the school does all that it can to ensure their success and that the school will not allow them to fail as a result. Parents feel that the school communicates well with them, makes them welcome and encourages them to become partners in the education of their children. Teachers make contact to celebrate successes, as well as to discuss problems or difficulties that may arise. The school’s goals and plans are known by all members of the school community and drive their actions in improving outcomes for students. Nevertheless, the impact is lessened somewhat by the inconsistencies that remain in their implementation.

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 established to support the school’s mission statement and places significant emphasis on interdisciplinary, project and inquiry based learning. A range of electives have been introduced to meet a variety of identified needs. Some focus on the development of specific skills, to support students who have weaknesses in these areas. Some are targeted to provide opportunities for differing multiple intelligences. Others, with an architectural or world wide focus, reflect the school’s mission. Response from students to the different electives varies, with a more positive evaluation of those thought to be personally relevant, either through interest, need or future aspirations. Students especially appreciate the opportunities, as offered through internships, to engage in real-life working environments. While the curriculum is therefore adequate, it is not yet sufficiently powerful to engage students to the degree where more want to come to school and be successful.

There are some good examples where learning is accessible, engaging and interesting for students. At their best, these provide hands-on and visual experiences that support

students well in picturing what they need to do and why. There are also good examples of learning that are directed at individual student needs, identified through the data. In some classes teachers effectively use what they know about individuals to group students and to provide differentiated support and challenge to them. Overall, however, while student engagement is at an acceptable level, teachers are not yet sufficiently skilled in the use of data to enable them to uniformly meet the learning needs of their students. The administration and coaches have supported and enabled teachers to make significant personal growth and improve their instruction.. For some, however, this has yet to develop into a full understanding of their accountability to meet the needs and aspirations of every student. Students confirm that there is someone on the staff to whom they could turn, should the need arise. They also believe that staff care about them, want them to succeed and that the school will not let them down.

Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are broadly driven by the needs of students. This includes, for example, rescheduling and providing additional staffing to enable more individual support to students following a review of pass rates in the fall semester. The school's low and falling attendance triggered a major improvement strategy. While not all teachers are yet implementing requirements fully, this strong recent focus is having an impact so that attendance has improved this month.

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 school has experienced a significant influx of staff as a result of its continued growth, as well as a relatively high turnover. The school has therefore not been able to build its systems and procedures gradually and consistently from one year to the next. As a result, the 'bottom lines' identified as necessary to support the school's vision have not all been implemented consistently and then sustained. In addition, the principal has faced difficulties in hiring staff with the degree of experience that would enable them to immediately support the school in achieving its goals. Consequently, professional development is a high priority. As a result of observing classroom teaching, the administration and coaches have a good understanding of the development needs of individual staff. Targeted guidance and support is enabling individual teachers to improve their practice so that they are developing alongside their students.

In parallel with improving classroom practice, the principal is also building the broader capacity of the school by dispersing leadership more widely. Opportunities are provided for staff to plan together and to collaboratively review data and students' work. Groups and committees have been established to improve areas of the school's work, such as discipline and attendance. There are good examples where individuals have been able to respond positively and make valuable contributions to the ongoing implementation of the school's vision. For others, the twin track of developing classroom expertise and taking wider responsibility has proved a considerable challenge. Not all staff are yet able to consistently meet the expectations and requirements of the school. Although procedures are clear and communicated, they are not always followed with sufficient diligence.

While continuing to grow and serve different students and families, the principal ensures that the school remains true to the original vision. She has gained the respect of the school community for this. The principal acknowledges that she has herself grown over the lifetime of the school. She has the capacity to continue to effect change to reach that

original vision. Well-established relationships with external partners provide positive additional experiences for students, as well as welcomed guidance and support for staff.

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.

Appropriate groups and committees have been established to support the school's monitoring and evaluation of progress towards achieving its goals, such as those established in the Comprehensive Education Plan. Meetings are sufficiently timely and reflective. Data increasingly lies at the heart of evaluations. However, the school is less proficient at establishing milestones and frequent interim goals to focus and target ongoing evaluation more tightly. The principal also recognises that data can drive these processes even more effectively, by drilling down to answer questions such as 'precisely who are these students?' Nevertheless, there are good examples of modifications to plans as a consequence of reviewing data. These include: the development of the curriculum to better meet the needs of male students, the improvements being made to student attendance and the analysis of behavioural incident data to drive the development of more consistent practice.

Significant staff changes have impaired the school's ability to build successively on each planning stage from year to year. This has slowed the school's growth, as each year considerable effort has been needed to induct new teachers and enable them to understand and implement the school's expectations and requirements. Sometimes this has resulted in greater change being necessary than initially anticipated. Nevertheless, the principal has been able to build the school to an adequate level of proficiency, while sustaining the initial vision to the point where its first cohort is about to graduate. The principal's own evaluation of the effectiveness of the school is suitably accurate.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Pablo Neruda Academy (HS 305)	∅	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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	