



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Lab School

Public School 315

**2246 Jerome Avenue
Bronx,
NY 10453**

Principal: Elsie Cardona-Berardinelli

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Reviewer: Carol Foresta

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well
What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Lab School is located in a leased facility in the West Tremont section of the Bronx and serves 220 students from kindergarten to grade 8. The majority of the students (79.9%) are Hispanic, which is far higher than in similar schools or Citywide. Black students represent 16.4%, which is much lower than similar schools or Citywide, and 3.7% of the students are Asian and other ethnicities. The proportion of students (88.8%) who are eligible for Title 1 is average when compared to similar schools, though considerably higher than Citywide.

Approximately 15% of the students are special education students, including those in two multi-age classes. Twenty-two percent of the students are identified as English language learners.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is well respected and is a highly motivated and passionate advocate for students.
- Teachers receive regular constructive feedback on instruction and strategies from coaches and administrators.
- Students have the opportunity to work independently, and collaboratively in an environment that is safe and well organized.
- Students feel respected and generally behave in a respectful way towards the adults.
- The school has a culture which embraces teachers, staff, students and families encouraging everyone to feel safe in its environment.
- Teachers and administrators have high expectations of students and communicate these through the ongoing reflective hard work they do to improve instruction.
- The school has adapted a medical-rounds model which has proven useful to deepening its understanding of how students learn.
- The school regularly surveys students and staff in order to gather information and make goals and plans that meet their needs.
- The school celebrates student work in poetry exhibitions, science exhibitions, music, dance, and portfolio presentations.
- Students benefit from the school's partnerships with Wave Hill, Lincoln Center's Nutcracker Project, and Lehman College.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue professional development dedicated to building the capacity of teachers to differentiate and customize instruction for all students.
- Deepen the use of school wide systems to enable all teachers to successfully collect and analyze data in order to use it effectively to improve instruction and increase feedback to students.
- Schedule regular and organized teacher inter-visitations with other schools in order to build on good practice.
- Continue the work with parents to engage more of them as partners in their children's education and gain their support for improving the attendance and punctuality of students who are consistently late or absent.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The Lab School is a small school where each student is known well. The principal is a seasoned educator who is respected by teachers, students and parents and who is committed to raising the achievement of all students in the school. Parents appreciate that everyone on the staff works together as a team, and that their children like going to school and feel safe there.

The staff has begun the process of using data to monitor and analyze students' progress and as a consequence the test results have been rising slowly over the past few years. Teachers are enthusiastic and hard working and benefit from the internal expertise provided by the principal, an assistant principal, the literacy and mathematics coaches and reading-recovery teacher. There is still some work to do to improve parental involvement, in teachers' use of data to align and differentiate instruction and in building further capacity to instigate the necessary further improvements. Due to secure systems for checking its work, the school has an accurate view of its strengths and areas for development.

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.

The school begins its analysis of student data in the summer as it plans for the school year. A visual presentation of student data is given to the staff in order to ensure that the teachers know how the students are doing and what the focus of the school will be. The school takes note of the fact that though boys and girls do equally well in the lower grades the boys start to drop off in their performance as they get to the middle school.

The school also recognizes that the majority of the Hispanic students are not doing as well as the Black students. The school analyzes these results and has designed a "push in" model rather than a "pull out" model which the English language learner teacher uses in order to align instruction with the work in the class. The school also recognizes that almost half of its population (100 students) are either English language learners or special needs students. As a result of this understanding the school ensures that teachers who support these students have the appropriate professional qualifications.

The school has also hired a half-time test coordinator, who ensures that all students receive practice tests in order to measure how they are progressing. This teacher also helps to organize the data into charts which are readable and accessible to all of the staff. These charts provide a visual representation for everyone to be able to understand clearly what progress is being made throughout the school, classroom by classroom and student by student. The data is so far restricted to in-school progress and there is no comparison with other schools.

This detailed analysis resulted in the school initiating the use of guided small-group instruction in the classroom and extended-day tutoring for the English language learners. It also resulted in the school beginning a system of “student-centered portfolios.” This system is relatively new to the school and thus it is not clear if it will benefit all of the students. However, the students have already been seen to take more ownership over their progress.

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.

A useful spreadsheet system has been established in order to keep teachers updated on the progress of the students. The coaches do item-skills analysis for each student to identify next learning steps. A profile is created of each class. Guided groups are created by the teachers. Specific benchmarks are set and coaches compile the information that is gathered so the results can be looked at school wide.

Teachers confer with students in one-on-one meetings. The school has created a “medical rounds” system to analyze how students are doing in the beginning, middle and end of the year. This is an effective protocol that the school utilizes to ensure that students who need the most support receive it.

All teachers meet with the principal to set goals for their class and for their own professional development. An accountability system protocol is established to keep the principal and teachers working together on the same goals. Teachers are responsible for the classroom environment, instruction, planning and preparation. Teachers are expected to set two goals for the year in each of these domains.

There are high expectations for the students’ achievement. Charts in every room show the progress the students are making. Student-data profile sheets and portfolios are created for each student in every grade. These are given to the next teacher by the former teacher and serve as an introduction to each student. The result is that teachers get to know the students’ academic work early in the school year. Teachers agree goals with the students although feedback about progress towards them is not regular enough in all classes. The principal and staff set monthly goals, which are shared with parents at monthly meetings between the principal and families. Parents appreciate that teachers keep them informed about how their children are progressing against their goals.

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 school has created curriculum maps based on themes. Each year the teachers modify these maps using Understanding by Design, and plan backwards from where they would like their outcomes to be. Last year the school focused on their social studies curriculum, next year they will give special attention to the science curriculum.

There are various events which are scheduled to support teaching and learning in subjects, such as students sharing their writing with the rest of the school, or talking about the experiments they are engaged in as small groups and individuals. Students keep portfolios in each class. Teachers are very organized and every classroom reveals student binders where each student's results are categorized, however the commentary on student work is not deep nor does it reveal any serious developmental process in place. The systems put into place to analyze data are understood and used effectively by the administrators and cabinet of the school and established teachers in the classroom. The result of this is that test scores have been slowly moving up over the last four years. The new teachers in the school, however, are not sufficiently familiar with the use of analysis in order to improve instruction and increase feedback to students. Differentiation of instruction and the customization of learning happen as teachers gain experience with the process resulting in a more effective way of delivering instruction.

Students remarked that they could rely on the teachers and that teachers gave them confidence that they would be successful. Students are particularly happy about the music and dance classes that they have in the school. They like their teachers and usually feel respected by them. Students feel this respect is generally given back to the teachers and the administration, with relatively few disruptions in the school. Students feel their good work is celebrated and that staff listen to problems and hear both sides if another student is involved. It is clear that the smooth way that the school functions helps the students feel the environment is one in which they can learn and be safe to take intellectual risks.

The school's budget is prepared and prioritized in the school leadership team. For example, it was decided by this group that next year's priority will be science. This means that more of the resources of the school will go into that subject area. Staffing and scheduling decisions are made while assessing the greatest need. Attendance is a priority at the school and parents are called at home if their child is late or absent.

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 and assistant principal know how to select people who "really care" about children and who have an area of strength and expertise. There is effort put into building community. The coaches do demonstration lessons for the teachers. The administration sees its relationship with families as a partnership. The administration makes it clear to all new staff that it expects them to stay in touch with the parents. Teachers new to the school are asked what they think about inclusion and diversity and whether they have a commitment to ensure that all students can learn.

Professional development is based on individual teacher's perceived needs and from the information gathered by the cabinet in classroom observations. The teachers requested professional development on the student-centered portfolio process. This was done and the result was much more involvement by the students, although there still remain important improvements to be made. Classroom observations revealed that there were gaps in the students' oral and written language development, and that teachers' feedback and questioning techniques were not sufficiently well developed. Teachers at present are not involved in inter-visitations with teachers in their subject areas and grades in other schools. The administration is planning on moving in the direction of organizing these systematic and organized visits.

New teachers in this school get support from coaches and administrators. The coaches demonstrate lessons and teach alongside new teachers in order to support them. The main objective here is improving instruction, for example, in advising teachers how to effectively use rubrics in the classroom. The administrators are regularly in classrooms observing and supporting all teachers and giving written feedback. Teachers value the common planning time they get with their colleagues and with the coaches. There is a feeling of collegiality and critical support alive in this school.

Students benefit from being in a small, personalized setting, with one class on each grade, and having a music/movement class and dance class in addition to regular academic classes. The school has links to Lehman College which enables students to participate in a physical education program since the present facility does not have a playground, a gym or an auditorium. The partnership with Lehman also provides the school with student teachers and interns.

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 principal and assistant principal do walk throughs and decide that the feedback given to the students needs to be more detailed. It is clear that students need to re-visit the goals set for them more regularly in order to improve. As a result, the school has instituted professional guidance to support teachers in making consistent efforts at giving students more effective feedback.

Teachers revise curriculum with the help of the coaches. Their maps and time frames are thoughtfully revisited throughout the school year. This design work and re-alignment is supported by consultations with coaches. Here they gather to consult the data and plan instruction. The analysis of these results is carefully combined with the observations of student class work. The principal and assistant principal made this information available to the teachers and talked about what it all means for the progress of the school. One result has been that the school has improved mathematics scores because there has been more guided instruction with students in small groups.

Because some systems for the analysis of data are new, and there are several new teachers, the school will have to continue to work hard to formalize these processes. However, it is clear that everyone is prepared to move together in an organized and effective way. This is evidenced by the learning standards prominently displayed in every room, conference logs in place, and rubrics present in student portfolios in every grade.

It is clear when plans need to be revised this will be done efficiently and expediently. This is evidenced by how the school moved to correct a situation with a teacher who was having difficulty negotiating his curriculum in an effective way. The school intervened and made suggestions about how to improve his practice. The coach was reassigned to work directly with the teacher who needed support. He was able to see her model the lessons in his classroom. This kind of flexibility ensures that students get the kind of instruction they need.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Lab School (PS 315)	∅	✓	+
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	