



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Comprehensive Model School Project**

**Middle School 327  
580 Crotona Park South  
Bronx  
NY 10456**

**Principal: Manuel Ramirez**

**Dates of review: March 8 – 9, 2007  
Reviewer: Alvin Jeffs**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Comprehensive Model School Project has developed from a program that was successfully attached to larger schools. It is now a middle school of 227 students located with Public School 110 in the Southern Bronx. It has been in existence for three years and currently serves grades 6 through 8.

The school comprises 65% Hispanic and 31% Black students. There are very small proportions from a range of other ethnic backgrounds. About a fifth of the students come from the immediate area, with many of the rest traveling considerable distances to attend.

Currently, there are 26 English language learners, 11%, and 15 special education students, 7% of the total. The school receives Title 1 funding, with 83% of the student body eligible. Attendance rates are running at 95% and the suspension rate is low. In both of these areas, the school is ahead of the New York City averages.

It is a small school with a relatively inexperienced staff. Less than 30% of its teachers have been in teaching for more than five years.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Students enjoy coming to a school where they are respected, safe and well taught.
- Parents say that the school is highly supportive and assists their children in developing high standards of behaviour and achievement.
- The work of everyone in the school is governed by the wish to ensure that all students realise their full potential.
- Students develop very good study skills and the motivation to work.
- The principal is highly respected by staff, students and parents and bears a significant responsibility for the outstanding performance of students.
- The use of data within the school is very effective in identifying individual needs.
- Teachers communicate and collaborate well, ensuring the best possible dissemination of skills and information.
- Classrooms are well resourced and technology is well integrated into subject teaching.
- At 95%, attendance is good and reflects the high level of student motivation.
- Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions contribute very effectively to the pursuit of high standards.

### What the school needs to improve

- Assess the school's performance against similar schools to see what can be learned.
- Provide clear overviews of how some important sub-groups of students are performing, and take action to address any differences.
- Use data to differentiate learning for students, so that work is at the correct level of challenge to raise achievement further.
- Review the management structure to ensure that the principal has adequate support in moving the school forward.
- Ensure that school plans have measurable goals that can be evaluated on a regular basis.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

The school has developed with an imaginative practice and philosophy that is rooted in the earlier Comprehensive Model School Project program. There is a very effective curriculum focus on the humanities and mathematics curricula. Teachers teach whole classes and many supports are put in place to ensure that students keep up with the group. Although this is not completely in line with current thinking on differentiation for individuals, it has been followed through with a commitment and a rigor that suggests that the school has found an alternative, and effective, way of raising student achievement. The success of this approach may be seen in the school's scores in recent examinations. The percentage of eighth grade students attaining levels 3 and 4 in 2006 has not only overtaken the average for the region but now also outstrip New York schools in general.

The principal has no assistants and there are no faculty leaders. This means that all decisions are made by groups of teachers and submitted to the principal for ratification. It has worked during the early years of the school, but now places too great a burden on the principal and does not maximize opportunities for senior staff to develop management skills. The work of the school is very much led by the principal's commitment to the Comprehensive Model School Project values and to his belief in the ability of all students to succeed academically as well as socially within a clear and supportive framework.

### 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 is very careful to ensure that the data it collects is immediately practical to its two central requirements, knowing the student better and moving on all students to mastery within English language arts and mathematics. When students arrive, the school uses the examination history and data passed on by fifth grade teachers to form classes that are similar in composition. It then adjusts groups on the basis of its own internal tests and classroom observations. Very soon each student has a report card and progress report which is updated every six weeks. This pragmatic approach means that each teacher very quickly has a detailed picture of every student they teach.

This information means that staff are always aware of the current performance and difficulties of individual students. Individual teachers supplement this with the outcomes from the Saturday enhancement program which most students attend. English language learners and special education students are no exception to this, but their data is supplemented by inputs from the specialist teachers who work with them in both push-in and pull-out models.

Although the school has a very clear picture of every student and this data is used on a daily basis to plan and modify instruction, it does not yet look at the trends in progress within sub-groups. This is partly because this small school has taken the first years to

develop its system and partly that individualization of assessment has already led to significant student success. The good quality data shows the developments of the heterogeneous class units and the school has a clear picture of what is needed to support special education students and English language learners.

However, the school is not currently able to identify the achievement of different ethnic groups and other sub-groups to ensure that its approach benefits all students equally. Similarly, comparison with similar schools is in its infancy. There is a clear similarity between this school and the small number of 'high achievement, low poverty schools'. Comparisons with these are not yet used in identification areas for development.

**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.**

Each teacher has a clear picture of what the data reveals about class achievement. Although the school is not strong on its understanding of sub-group achievement, it uses data well to develop easily measurable goals for classes. Regular conferencing with individual students means that there is also a sharp focus on how each student is achieving compared with the class group. If students experience difficulties, they have access to one-on-one time with the subject teacher, after-school groups and the Saturday program to support them. In this way, class goals are clear and work is appropriate for individual students through regular assessment and subsequent one-to-one discussions.

All data is regularly shared with students and parents. It is regarded as the basis for every discussion. Student conferencing also takes place within individual subjects, making it clear where each student is and what the next step is. Parents receive regular information from the school and, when meeting with teachers, have access to the same data as their children, other teachers and the principal. This openness and respect lies at the center of a current initiative where the school expects to give all parents access to their child's progress and current work online.

A student experiencing significant difficulties will receive additional support from subject teachers and specialist support staff. The fact that the data is recent means that instruction is apt and it is rare for a student to fall behind the class to the point where this becomes a cause for concern. In practice these processes are effective. The combination of a small school with very good communication systems and a principal with an energetic belief in the need for, and possibility of, mastery in basis skills for all students means that everyone within the school community is driven by the wish and need to ensure that every student excels.

**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.**

Staff display an impressive understanding of each student. The strong emphasis on the humanities and mathematics curricula means that there is a very strong focus on students' number and literacy skills. This sharp focus does not detract from a stimulating curriculum.

Thus, work on the Great Wall of China or slavery has developed naturally to support current interests and texts to be used in class. Students testify that they enjoy the curriculum and cite gym and technology as enjoyable experiences. These do enhance the curriculum, but the school is constrained in both areas by a building that does not have adequate space for the most effective teaching in either subject.

The regular discussion of class performance means that teachers are accountable. Every teacher teaches to the core of the class, usually seen as 80% of the students. Although this practice is not an individually differentiated curriculum, it is an approach that has achieved impressive results. Teaching engages students.

The respect shown by staff for students is reciprocated and this creates a common cause between adults and young people, the quest for academic success. Students know that their problems can be shared with staff and that confidentiality will be matched by effective strategies to overcome them. Staff devote a considerable amount of lunch and after-school time to this and their students appreciate the fact. It is also reflected in the high level of attendance, the result of high motivation and prompt and efficient procedures for checking absences.

Teachers are well supported with resources. In particular the recent introduction of interactive whiteboards and laptops for recording data has provided the tools with which staff can more easily teach to and record the clear goals they set themselves and students. The principal has developed a teacher center, which staff have welcomed. It is a room within which to plan, to exchange information on students and bring records up to date. It has been a powerful tool in putting the school's vision into practice. Staffing and scheduling are driven by the need to maximize student performance. For this reason, the employment of additional staff this year means that sixth grade students can be taught English language arts in small classes, while a flexible schedule allows staff meetings to take place without students' work programs being disrupted.

**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.**

Staff discussions amongst themselves or with the principal are of a high quality with appropriate use of data. Teamwork within the school is of a high quality, with a clear discussion of goals and a very regular monitoring of individual, class and faculty performance. Some of the discussions remain at an informal level, but are characterized by modification of records or programs by individual teachers. Teaching is very flexible and responsive as the result of weekly updates of student work and the six-weekly review of individual students.

The principal is highly regarded by students, parents and staff, partly because he is a good teacher himself. His regular observations of staff are, therefore, credible and respected. He has been at the center of all developments since the school opened and carries significant responsibility for this imaginative and effective approach to middle school education. He is very clear that all staff appointed should have an empathy with the students and a willingness to collaborate closely with all colleagues, and these are explored in a rigorous hiring process. The school has a clear vision and good day-to-day procedures to enforce that vision. Regular meetings and, as important, the daily informal meetings within the teachers room ensure that these are put in place quickly and consistently. The 'zero tolerance' approach to poor behavior is well modeled by the

principal and contributes well to a school where there is little disruption and a high level of respect between adults and young people.

A good professional development program has been facilitated by the employment of consultants, in, for example, the excellent work on assessment of student writing currently undertaken by English language arts staff. In addition, considerable professional development has taken place to support the introduction of electronic whiteboards. Staff confidence in this area is high and the boards are well used to support instruction.

The school has a successful partnership with a local high school which has meant that grade 8 students have the opportunity to undertake laboratory work in science on a weekly basis. Other successful links include those with a club for girls dealing with their concerns and interests, and one which supports after-school basketball. Both of these initiatives have contributed well to the motivation and attendance of students. The school also has access to external support from professional psychologists and support staff on an advisory basis. Staff report that this has made them more reflective and aware of individual 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.**

The small size of the school means that much of the work normally carried out by a cabinet is undertaken by the principal. Teachers and coaches deal directly with him on a regular basis as do other specialist staff within the school. This has worked well and procedures are followed through appropriately. However, not enough of the strategic thinking and monitoring is taken on by staff other than the principal. This means that there is a missed opportunity for enhancing the management experience of staff and equipping them to model new practices within classrooms.

The development of the Comprehensive Education Plan follows a clear cycle which ensures that all staff review and update targets within their areas of expertise. The draft plan is reviewed and amended by all staff as appropriate. Reviews and updates take place during the year. As more data becomes available, this process is becoming more refined and an action plan format with responsibilities and deadlines is developing well. The plan lacks interim goals with measurable success criteria and this, together with the lack of regular cabinet meetings, means that strategic thinking is not adequately responsive to data that develops during the year.

A school leadership team has now developed, with the requisite 50% parent membership. So far this has been more a question of the principal keeping the group up to date rather than reviewing interim goals in a rigorous manner. The year-on-year improvement in examination results indicates that the plans developed so far have addressed the main issues. This is yet another area where the dedication to student success has been effective.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Comprehensive Model School Project (MS 327)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			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"> <li>ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>	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"> <li>all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			X

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	