



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Dream Yard Preparatory School

High School 329

**240 East 172nd Street
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Rod Bowen

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Reviewer: Cheryl Baker

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Dream Yard Preparatory School is an empowerment high school currently serving 112 9th grade students. It was founded in September 2006 and shares a facility with five other small high schools. The school plans to add a grade each year until it reaches capacity in 2009. Sixty-one percent of students are Hispanic, 36% are Black, 2% are White and 1% represents other backgrounds. Thirteen percent are special education students and thirteen percent are English language learners. The school is Title I eligible with the percent of qualifying students exceeding the City average. Attendance has averaged at 75%.

As an empowerment school, Dream Yard Preparatory enjoys reduced reporting and paperwork requirements and has greater flexibility with respect to decisions about budget allocations and professional development.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The vision for the integration of academics and the arts, championed by the principal and his staff is well supported by its partner organization.
- Students are afforded numerous curricular and extracurricular opportunities for exploring and developing their creativity.
- The school has established a uniform approach to the development of standards based units and lessons that support the continuity of instruction and assessment.
- Students are empowered to share in the development of the school through representation on the student leadership cabinet.
- Technology is well used in instruction and as a means of communicating among and between administration, teachers, students and parents.
- The school has established a common vocabulary regarding the aspects of skillful teaching that is reflected in the feedback from formal and informal observations of teaching.
- Students are known and supported through the advisory structure.

What the school needs to improve

- Engage all constituencies in a data driven collaborative process that results in a three year strategic plan for the school's development and improvement that specifies short and long term goals, actions, benchmarks, responsible parties and measures of success.
- Codify school-wide policies and practices in handbooks for teachers, students and parents.
- Develop programs and identify appropriate staff to meet the identified needs of special education students and English language learners.
- Develop an academic intervention services program to ensure that at-risk students are identified and interventions are administered and routinely evaluated.
- Provide professional development in data analysis, classroom management and differentiated instructional techniques.
- Identify a periodic assessment tool to increase the regular diagnosis of students' academic progress and discrete learning needs.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school.

The school's principal and its partner Dream Yard founded the school in September 2006 after an extended period of preparation. The principal, guidance counselor and social worker and three of the school's seven teachers are new to their respective roles. In its eight months of existence the school has begun to gather data that has sharpened its understanding of its students. Overall goals and plans have not been formalized. The formats for curriculum and teacher evaluation are clearly defined. While the school's vision underpins its actions, much of its professional development time has been co-opted by operational needs, described by some as being reactive rather than proactive.

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 undeveloped.

Thus far, the operational data used by the school are the results of teachers' classroom assessments, their first semester grades, and attendance data. The school's access to the department of education's reporting systems was delayed and the school was slow to identify patterns of attendance. The late arrival of grade 8 scores hampered the identification of level 1 and 2 students. Likewise, the school was not immediately aware of its special education and English language learner populations. The progress of the schools different ethnic groups has not been analyzed.

The schools' population is approximately 70% female and the school has noted that girls are over represented in its incident reports. The school also has identified nearly one third of its students as being over age for their grade by two or more years. This group is predominantly male. Student services are exploring support mechanisms for these students.

Due to the abbreviated amount of data and the school's short history, comparisons with similar schools, grade levels and the school's past performance are premature. Comparisons among students and teachers are made by the principal. Little comparison among academic subjects and ethnicities has been undertaken.

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 undeveloped.

The school has not developed a process for collaboratively setting long and short term goals and plans. The school leadership team and parent organization are under

development. A Comprehensive Education Plan has not been written nor does the principal have a principal's performance review. Thus, goals and plans for improving student performance and progress do not, in a formalized and deliberate fashion, drive the activity of all members of the school community.

The school has established a format for its curriculum planning which underpins the development of units and lessons. This has been well instituted in English language arts and is emerging in other content areas. An attendance plan was formulated in the second semester. Some goal setting regarding credit accumulation has been undertaken with students. The school does not have an established academic intervention services process. The social services department is called upon to assist the school operationally and is not as able as it might be to address individual students' needs, although they do hold weekly case conferences to discuss struggling students. There is no provision for services to aid its English language learners. The school did hire a special education teacher when it realized its population included students with individual education plans. However, teacher absence has inhibited the delivery of services. Saturday school and after school help have been added recently to credit accumulation.

The school's mission and vision are well communicated to all constituencies through electronic and print media. Additionally, the principal and the school partners outreach to potential students through the recruiting process. The school's core values, 'Scholarship, Artistry and Character', are infused in its documents. Parents also receive mailings, progress reports and report cards. However, parent participation in the life of the school is minimal. Students, on the other hand, are afforded a voice in the school through representation on the principal's student leadership cabinet. Each week he meets with this advisory body to address school-wide issues collaboratively.

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.

Teachers have developed curriculum for all content areas using a common standards-based format that includes assessment practices. Some disciplines are more developed than others. Courses that integrate the arts into the academic content, a unique feature of the school, also utilize this format. The principal holds teachers responsible for instructional improvement through classroom observations and holds them responsible for improving student outcomes through the review of students' grades. Teachers not performing as expected have been counseled to move on. Teachers plan lessons using a common format reflective of their unit planning and instruction is generally engaging, especially in the arts related courses and when technology is well integrated. Differentiation is primarily exhibited by activity and instructional grouping.

The principal has responded to emerging student data by making adjustments to the budget, staffing and scheduling. For example, funds were allocated to hire a special education teacher and school aide when special education students were identified. Student placement in cohort groups was shifted to accommodate their anticipated interventions and materials were purchased to support their needs. The school's tutoring period was moved from a morning to an afternoon program to increase attendance. The role of the director of arts programming was expanded to a full time position when the unanticipated demands of the position warranted. Adjustments to the focus of some of the

arts integration as well as the after school arts activities have been made based on assessments of learning and student interests.

Students meet in advisory periods three times per week and report that this structure provided them with access to adults who know and support their academic and personal needs. They feel respected by their teachers and the principal, who knows each of his students.

Attendance has emerged as a challenge for the school and recently, an attendance plan was developed and more aggressive outreach to homes has begun. Incentives for attendance and promptness are being put into place.

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 an elaborate protocol for hiring that includes a model lesson, a core value assessment, response to a behavior scenario and interrogation of how potential candidates assess students' progress and use this information instructionally. The school has a well developed format for the supervision and evaluation of instruction that is reflective of the school's focus on developing a common language regarding high quality teaching. Formal and informal observation forms allow for instructive feedback. Early in the school year the principal was able to visit classrooms frequently but this practice has diminished as the school year has progressed. Intervisitations among staff are not routine although teachers of the same subject do plan together.

As a small school with just over a dozen staff members, discussions and planning naturally take place as a team. Weekly ninety-minute faculty conferences allow for regular collaboration. While this time had been designed with a professional development focus, the demands of decision making related to opening a new school and establishing well understood and consistent operational practices have taken precedent over professional development. Teachers are supported in accessing outside workshops and courses.

The principal is respected and has the capacity to develop the school in line with its unique mission. His work and that of the school are well supported by Dream Yard, its partner organization. The school is intended to be a conduit for students who have attended other Dream Yard schools at the primary and intermediate levels. Students benefit from instruction by artists who design in-class and after school programs that provide artistic and academic challenge. Students have access to university programs and arts-related corporations.

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 undeveloped.

Currently, the school lacks a Comprehensive Education Plan or other plans that set forth final or interim goals and outcomes relative to overall school improvement. However, the

school has been agile and flexible in realigning practices and resources when necessary. The reassignment of special education students, the rescheduling of extended day tutoring and changes in staffing are evidence of the school's willingness to react to issues.

The school has begun to compare student progress utilizing an on-line grading program. It also collects and analyzes students' personal information, their course grades, attendance and credit accumulation to identify those off track for graduation or those in promotional risk. As yet, it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions such as Saturday school and after school tutoring. Interventions for special education students and English language learners are not yet fully available for these students.

The school's achievement team, formed to carry out the action research required of empowerment schools, initially administered the Princeton Review to assess its students. The delay in receiving results and the test's misalignment with instruction negated its effectiveness. However, the results did surface a deficit in vocabulary among most students. Based on that data, the team identified words commonly misunderstood in each content area and launched a school-wide vocabulary base-line assessment. The actions resulting from this data were emerging at the time of the review.

The school is aware of its need to move from a reactive to a proactive operational mode as it moves forward. Solidifying its planning and goal setting are intended actions for the future.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Dream Yard Preparatory School (HS 329)	∅	✓	+
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		