



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Accion Academy**

**Intermediate School 341**

**1825 Prospect Avenue**

**Bronx**

**NY 10460**

**Principal: Sharron Spann**

**Dates of review: April 23 -24, 2007**

**Reviewer: Jan Lomas**

# 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' extra

### Information about the school

Accion Academy - Intermediate School 341, currently serves 200 students between grades 6, 7 and 8. The school is in its third year of existence and, in that time, has grown from the original 77 grade 6 students. This means that this is the first year that the school has had a cohort of grade 8 students. The current interim principal has been in post since September 2006.

The school moved from another shared location, to start the new school year 2006-7 in a building shared with an elementary school. The attendance has fallen from 93.6% in 2005, which was slightly higher than similar and city-wide schools to the current rate of 91%. The percentage of students known to be eligible for title 1 funding is 68.5%.

The proportion of students who are English language learners is 9%, while the proportion of special education students is 9.5%. Fifty-seven percent of students are Hispanic, 39.5% Black and the remainder is from other ethnic backgrounds. In 2005, the percentage of students who were recently arrived in the country was much lower, at 1.3%, that that for similar and other city schools.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal has taken positive steps to improve some key systems and structures and to assess the school's needs in order to plan for the future.
- Teachers know students well and are concerned for the development of the whole child.
- Parental involvement has begun to improve and the parent coordinator has been a positive part of this.
- The school now has the mandated curriculum in place as a starting point for further development.
- A schedule for classroom observations has been put in place and implemented.
- Students speak confidently about the value of peer mediation strategies and their role within these.
- The EIS team has worked well to develop reflective thinking about strategies to motivate and assist students in order to promote their progress.
- Interim assessments such as the Princeton Review have been put in place and support for teachers in using these provided.
- Teachers' opportunities to meet together to collaborate in grade and departmental meetings and common preparation times have been set in place.

### What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen teachers' capacity to use data effectively to drive well-matched, differentiated instruction.
- Implement goal-setting at all levels in order to sharply focus school improvement strategies upon student progress.
- Bring plans to extend professional development opportunities to fruition and ensure their clear impact upon classroom practice and student achievement.
- Continue to strengthen systems and structures which enable the effective collection, analysis, comparison and use of data in order to drive school improvement.
- Develop curriculum maps, aligned to key standards, which are specific to the school context.
- Develop collaborative strategic planning as a meaningful tool that is underpinned by systems and structures that ensure effective monitoring and evaluation.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is an undeveloped school.**

This is a school where the principal and her colleagues are concerned for the welfare of each young person in their care. Accion Academy is moving towards proficiency, however further improvement in key areas is still needed. The school has faced a number of challenges this year. Due to its incremental growth, this relatively new school reluctantly moved to begin the current school year on the fifth floor of a shared building. These premises bring their constraints, having a small gymnasium, no auditorium, a cafeteria five floors below and very little current 'extra space' for such facilities as a library. The school is likely to gain some extra classroom space next year but will continue to be without disabled access.

The new principal took up her post in September 2006 and has spent her first year assessing the school's needs. On her arrival, she determined the need to quickly improve the curriculum, student behavior, and various systems and organizational matters. Changes have been made, although some of these need further time and effort to be consolidated and developed in order to be fully effective. Staffing issues have brought constraints in the school's development this year. The assistant principal left in January 2007 and, due to student numbers, it proved necessary to deploy the literacy coach as a classroom teacher. Unavoidable periods of staff absence from some key posts have also brought pressure to bear on forward momentum. The staff team is very largely in its first years of professional experience and staffing challenges mean that resources for their support and development have also been constrained. Despite this, the principal has taken steps to move the school and staff forward, teachers are collegial and willing to collaborate, and more experienced teachers have given support to colleagues.

The school is aware of the need to improve its current academic performance to ensure students make appropriate progress and reach their potential in key areas. Strategic planning for next year is now starting. A sharp focus on student achievement, underpinned by rigorous use and analysis of data, and a clear structure for the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards goals is necessary and the principal is very aware of this. She well knows the importance of the current planning phase in order to provide the clarity, focus and energy to rapidly direct the school forward.

### **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.**

The principal put in place a data-driven instruction action plan in January 2007 and shared information from the 2005-6 report card with staff. Weekly meetings throughout the last three months have also identified areas for discussion, training, and the sharing of information leading from data use. The school has begun to use Princeton Review and a consultant has worked with staff to begin to develop teachers' understanding of how to use

the data generated identify areas where students need further support. However, the use of this data to drive instruction remains an area for continued development. Some teachers also use WRAP to check the performance of some struggling readers and examples of useful conference notes for monitoring elements of English language arts are in place. Unit tests are used for mathematics.

The small school environment means that teachers know students well and are concerned for each child's needs. However, overall, steps forward made in building a whole school, coherent approach to assessment and the use of data represent a work in progress. The new principal has used data from report cards and comparison with other schools in the local network to help build her understanding of school performance.

Data is shared and discussed with staff and opportunities for collaborative meetings have been put in place. However, the current staffing structure, and the lack of senior leaders within this, mean that opportunities and time to support teachers, particularly the less experienced, in the use of data are stretched thin. Systems and structures which enable monitoring and comparative analysis are currently insufficient to provide a clear and easily accessible overview of individual, class and grade progress over time, during the year and between subjects. This means that it is not possible to easily identify patterns and trends in quantitative data and to discover how much progress students are making.

The school has responded to its Empowerment School status by establishing a team which is studying a group of fifteen 7<sup>th</sup> grade students who are performing at around level 2. The study of this group has led to, for example, the identification of fluency skills as an area of specific need. This demonstrates that the school is beginning to explore and extend the ways that data can be used constructively within its context. NYSESLAT results and the Harcourt Brace interim assessments are used to inform support for English language learners. However, overall, data is not disaggregated well enough, or compared by class and grade, in order to provide a clear picture of the ongoing performance of key groups including, for example, those defined by gender and ethnicity.

**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.**

This year has been used by the new principal to assess the school's needs and the next few months will be critical in providing improved clarity and focus about the way forward. When she arrived some eight months ago, the Comprehensive Educational Plan had not been updated for the current year, 2006-7. There is an intention to set time aside at the end of this year to prepare thoroughly for the next and the principal intends to adopt a collaborative process to create next year's plan. However, at present, the school does not have current, measurable whole-school goals or a strategic plan to provide overarching direction for its work in raising student achievement. Whilst specific plans are agreed for some students who are particularly in need of attention, predictive goals, rooted in the rigorous analysis of data, are not yet set for all individuals and subjects. Such goals can also, when aggregated, be used to create class, grade and whole-school measurable goals to raise achievement. Teachers now have common planning times and meetings which provide more possibilities to plan for instructional strategies. However, while teachers are also willing to meet informally, the school is aware that it would like to extend scheduled

time for such collaboration. This includes time for support teachers and classroom staff to share information about students' needs.

The school is developing its provision for 'at risk' students and those most in need of attention and now has a clear matrix which shows the services and interventions that students receive. Space presents some constraints in the amount of pull out support that is undertaken. Nevertheless, the school has extended its programs for academic intervention services to provide for identified needs in comprehension skills amongst level 1 and 2 students. Extended day and Saturday school sessions have focused upon preparation for tests, support for reading skills and mathematics, again, largely for level 1 and 2 students. Further time will be needed to see the full impact and evaluate the efficacy of these interventions.

The school has begun to identify some issues relating to the performance of some groups defined by ethnicity or gender, to target the purchasing of resources in some areas and to use the work of the EIS group to explore areas for development. However, it has not yet begun to target, for example, students across the school on the cusp between level 2 and 3, despite the knowledge that the school's level average in English language arts is just below level 3. The school's success in ensuring that high expectations are conveyed to parents and students is mixed at present.

The appointment of a new parent coordinator has meant that the principal has been able to make progress in providing workshops about aspects of their students' education. His telephone calls to homes have resulted in better attendance at parent association events which are led by an active president. The one parents' representative available for interview felt that the curriculum was now better structured and that behavior had also improved this year. Parents are now contacted about lateness or because uniform is not being worn. While the principal confirms that behavior has improved, remaining noisiness in corridors always does not lead, for example, to prompt arrival in the next room. Students interviewed feel that the school encourages students to be leaders and to be 'young adults'.

Some teachers use rubrics to help students to understand next steps but this is inconsistent at present. It is clear that, under the new principal, the changes made are helping students and parents to better understand the school's expectations and aims. However, more time will be needed to further develop and consolidate the steps forward made and to ensure that the hardworking and willing staff are fully focused upon clear goals and aspirations for student progress and achievement.

**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 principal has ensured that the mandated curriculum is in place for the first time this year and scheduling now ensure the appropriate entitlement of subject time. The school has not yet mapped the curriculum to match with its specific context, to support its project based approach and to ensure alignment with the standards where there is some integration of subject areas. Budgeting has been effectively used to buy in Impact Math and an appropriate science program. Although these are positive steps forward, there are insufficient resources in some areas, such as science. The school has firm plans in place

to update and extend the weak technology equipment. Whilst sufficient overall, there is more to be done to strengthen the structure of the curriculum and the resource level so that teaching and learning are fully supported. At present, all students have a number of advisory sessions per week and the principal is currently reconsidering the balance of the curriculum with the need to raise student achievement in the core subjects in mind.

Students' representatives enjoy planned trips such as to the 'Clearpool Education Center' and project work which engages their interest. Where lessons are well structured, appropriately paced and there are clear expectations of behavior, engagement is enhanced and students are well focused on their learning. However, the principal is aware that classroom management is not yet consistently effective across the teaching and team and plans to strengthen this area through professional development. The ability of teachers to use data to deliver well differentiated instruction that is matched to students' needs and ensures appropriate progress is very variable. A number of teachers are in the early years of their career and the absence of an assistant principal, a coach, or other lead teachers has necessarily reduced support opportunities as they continue to develop their practice. The principal now has plans to appoint an assistant principal.

Staff know students very well and are keen to meet social and emotional as well as academic needs. Students' representatives speak of friendly and affirming relationships with teachers. They appreciate opportunities to learn peer mediation skills. The school has worked hard to improve student behavior however there is a continued need to ensure clear expectations about calm, orderly behavior at all times including movement between classrooms. Attendance has fallen since 2005 but the school has strengthened its procedures and has created an attendance team to enable a focus upon this area. The principal confirms that lateness has decreased.

**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 only member of staff appointed by the principal is the parent coordinator who has played a positive role in improved strategies to involve parents. Teachers were involved in the interview process. The principal has now developed a rubric for the forthcoming appointment of a new assistant principal. Professional development has been provided in-house through ongoing support from the principal and through opportunities to learn with and from each through collaborative meetings and occasional intervisitations. Support for teacher development in the use of Princeton Review is being provided by a consultant and teachers also attend external empowerment network training.

Some staff feel that professional development opportunities have been limited however much of this is due to the constraints of the current depletion of key staff roles. Whilst this area is currently undeveloped, the principal is highly aware of the need to extend professional development and now has plans for the use of external consultants well in hand. She has instigated procedures for classroom observation that meet mandated requirements although staffing constraints have also created some limitations in the amount of follow up support after a classroom visit. .

It is clear that the principal, in her first year, has enabled the introduction or strengthening of some key systems and structures which have improved how the school runs on a day to

day basis. She has improved the focus upon data to drive instruction but this needs further development. Time is now needed to see the full utilization, consolidation or impact of these steps forward. The principal is currently drawing on the services of a leadership coach to provide her with professional mentorship while the support of an assistant principal and a coach is missing from the staff team. This is a useful move. With the greater clarity gained about the way forward that the first year has brought, she is now in a position to seize the moment and make decisive steps forward based on clear, well focused strategic planning for the forthcoming academic year. The school uses its partnership with the Phipps organization to provide its after-school program, its peer mediation program and to support its valued, yearly visits to the Clearpool Education Centre. A further partnership with the New Victory theatre also extends and enriches opportunities for students.

**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.**

The school does not have a current Comprehensive Educational Plan although it is moving towards the next cycle. The principal is aware of the need to ensure that clear goals and plans for the whole year are agreed and shared by all stakeholders in order to ensure clarity about the school's priorities for improving student achievement. The recently adopted Princeton Review provides opportunities for embedding interim assessments within the proposed new plan in order to provide objectively measurable ways in which progress towards goals can be periodically checked, evaluated and adapted. This augurs well for the future but, at present, strategic planning, and built-in systems to monitor progress, is undeveloped.

Opportunities for teachers to develop the use and potential of Princeton Review interim assessments mean that some are beginning to use this data to identify key areas where students need further support and teaching. However, overall, systems and structures that effectively enable comparisons of student progress throughout the year and over time and which are used effectively throughout the school are still developing. The principal has used this year to assess the school's needs while putting some key systems and structures, for example, the mandated curriculum, in place.

Staff now meet for collaborative meetings and the outcomes of discussions about data, performance and instructional strategies are resulting in changes in the provision the school makes for its students. For example, the 'Soar to Success' program has been brought in to supplement programs for those needing support in reading and adjustments have been made to the ELA program in order to support the identified need to support fluency and comprehension skills. The school will need further time to see the impact of such strategies and to build on these steps forward to escalate the rate of school improvement.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Accion Academy (IS 341)</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		