



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Academy for Career and Living Skills

Public School 811

**1434 Longfellow Avenue
Bronx
NY 10459**

Principal: Caron Martin

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Reviewer: Helen Donnellan

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Academy for Career and Living Skills, Public School 811, is a school for special education students located in the south Bronx, serving students from grades 8 to 12. Student numbers have risen to 602 and the school is now at capacity. It is the largest District 75 program in the City. Students aged over 18 years attend work sites for career education. Classes are taught in a variety of student to teacher to para-professional ratios. There are 225 students in 12:1:4 classes; 180 in 12:1:1 classes and 165 in 6:1:1 classes. Each of these class groupings exists in a discrete departmental house led by an assistant principal. In addition there are inclusion classes at an off-site general education high school, where the instructional ratio is 9:1:3.

Students have a range of disabilities including autism, medical fragility, emotionally disturbed, learning disability and challenging behavior. Fifty nine percent of students are Hispanic, 33% are Black, 5% are White and 3% are Asian and other groups. Thirty seven percent of students are female and 63% are male. Seventeen percent of students are English language learners; Spanish being their home language. All students are assessed using alternate assessments.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and administrative team lead the school effectively, making clear the need for improvement.
- The school has effective working relationships with colleagues from the inclusion site, related services and work-place providers.
- Students have differentiated programs, based upon the goals in their individual education plans.
- There is increased structure with protocols to support this, as defined in the staff handbook.
- Mutual respect is evident between staff and students, which contributes to a positive learning atmosphere.
- Disruptive and challenging behaviors are well-managed, using positive management strategies.
- Where teaching is strong, teachers have high expectations of students, provide age-appropriate content and students are active and engaged in learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Collect and analyze data gathered on each student to give an overall picture of progress made over time and to compare progress of different groups.
- Use data routinely to set goals for each student.
- Continue to review the structure of the day, so that instructional opportunities are maximized.
- Create opportunities for all staff to share their expertise and good practice.
- Ensure that feedback following classroom observations is specific and focused, so staff are clear about what and how to improve.
- Define measurable goals in plans and amend these when data indicates this to be necessary.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Public School 811, the Academy for Career and Living Skills is a school which has experienced extensive change in recent years as numbers of students enrolled has risen and their needs have changed. The school collects a range of data on all of its students at the main site, inclusion site and work sites. This is being used increasingly as the basis for planning instruction. However, it is not presented in readily accessible formats which show progress over periods of time.

The principal, who has been the school leader for two years, is implementing changes, but acknowledges resistance from some staff. Change is supported by professional development, with the principal setting a good example of continuing professional development. Staff explained, "She challenges you as a professional in a positive way. She challenges herself." The principal is accessible to staff, students and parents at all sites. Students feel supported and approach adults with their concerns. This is summed up by a student, "I get better – get my smile back."

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 progress of students at the main site and the general education site is regularly assessed through alternate assessment, Brigance inventory scales and informal teacher assessment. Teachers maintain records to show the progress of each student against their individual education plan. The school adds data on behavior and attendance to provide an holistic picture of each student. In addition, the functional use of English by English language learners is assessed by focused classroom observations, to ensure that they make progress. Work site records for students on work study programs show progress against individual education plan goals and work skill development. The perceptions of external work site staff add to the assessment information from school sources, to give a full picture of these students. Baseline assessments are carried out with all students at entry to the school and repeated after six months to give an indication of progress. The school pays close attention to the progress of medically fragile students to track the development of skills and ensure that programs match their needs.

Comparisons of progress made against individual education plan goals are meaningful as they show the progress made. However, the school does not track the progress made by each student over longer periods of time, to give a broader picture of their learning and development. The data on groups is not presented to give a readily accessible indication of progress made over periods. Currently no comparisons of the progress of different groups of students are carried out and no comparisons are made with other schools.

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.

Staff members do collaborate with parents to set relevant goals for each student’s plan, moving the student to the overall goal of successful adult learning and living. The administrative team has identified that data is not used with sufficient rigor to set goals that closely align with the students’ needs. Data is not used routinely to set goals for all students as part of their individual education plan. Emphasis is placed on improving the communication and functional skills of all students, regardless of their communication mode or disability. Data from the vocational section of the Brigance scales is used appropriately to identify goals for work site students.

Expectations and goals are shared with parents through regular contacts with teachers, paraprofessionals and the parent coordinator. The school encourages parents to attend individual educational plan meetings and where this is not possible, seeks their views through telephone interviews. Parents are informed of the daily happenings of school life, through regular written communication and telephone contact. Homework is given so that students can reinforce class work, which also gives parents insights to how and what their children are learning.

Meetings of school staff and support service professionals, for example therapists, counselors and off-site colleagues, ensure that plans are shared and duplication is avoided.

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.

Recent changes introduced by the principal have resulted in more structure to the curriculum. The curriculum has also been widened and materials tailored to make the content more age appropriate for students. Everyday Mathematics games and manipulatives have been adapted by teachers who strive to match resources to the students’ needs. Students value the wider curriculum and more “fun” approaches in their instruction.

Students have differentiated programs, based upon the goals in their individual education plans. The administration team use classroom observations to verify that instruction is differentiated to match the students’ needs, holding staff accountable for the quality and impact of their work. Where lack of differentiation is seen, staff members are given support to improve their practice.

The principal monitors the school budget closely and allocates spending so that all students can be supported in their learning. When allocating teachers, the needs of students, teachers’ preferences and their strengths are used to make optimal decisions. The school day has been lengthened to increase instructional time for all students. However, transportation pick up at the school has not been adjusted to occur at the end of

the lengthened day and instructional time continues to be lost. Students are passive while waiting for transportation, as opportunities to practice skills and knowledge are not used.

Students are engaged and active in lessons where teachers use a variety of teaching styles and lively approaches. Where teaching is strong, teachers have expectations of students, provide age appropriate content and students contribute in meaningful ways. The principal makes clear to students her expectations for their regular attendance and good behavior and enforces this through sanctions. Attendance has risen as a result of its higher profile. Absence is routinely followed up by the parent coordinator and teachers also contact parents to verify reasons for absence.

Mutual respect is evident between staff and students, which contributes to a positive learning atmosphere. Staff members communicate with students using speech, symbols and assistive devices. Staff members detect small changes in student responses and are discreet in giving students time to share any concerns. Disruptive and challenging behaviors are well managed, using positive management strategies. At the inclusion site, one of the special education students is a class vice president, which reflects the high level of respect students receive at this location.

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 has hired a number of New York City Teaching Fellows since her own appointment, which has resulted in staff who bring a fresh eye and a positive attitude towards special education.

The organization of the school into three houses means that opportunities for staff to share expertise are minimal. Knowledge is 'held' within the staff teams at each house, rather than using the knowledge as a whole school resource. Staff within each house meet to share goals during their cohort meetings, but this is not a practice which extends across the whole school. Some inter-visitations take place where staff share good practice as part of improving instruction. The need to provide more professional development on the analysis and use of data is seen as a priority, to increase further the use of the data available.

The assistant principal for each house carries out lesson observations. Where their observations raise concerns, the principal carries out a further observation to verify possible underperformance. She also monitors a sample of the written feedback following the assistant principal's observations. However, written feedback is not always specific and lacks focus. Consequently staff receiving feedback are not clear about what they need to improve.

The principal and administrative team lead the school effectively, making clear the need for improvement. The principal is accessible to staff, students and parents and she listens to their views in a considered way. The increased structure and procedures are made clear to staff in a handbook, where roles and responsibilities are defined. Where procedures are not followed, the administration promptly explores what took place, so that any necessary changes to procedures can be put in place without delay.

The effectiveness of work site placements is carefully monitored with weekly visits made to sites, to review how students are applying skills and developing their knowledge, in line with their defined goals. There is an excellent working relationship with the staff at the inclusion site for high school students, where students are fully included in the school.

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.

Monitoring the progress of students and overall plans is systematic as it forms part of the cabinet's bimonthly review. The pacing calendar defines the structure for this and is followed to ensure that progress is reviewed every two months. Not all the goals of the Comprehensive Education Plan are written with sufficient precision to support effective monitoring of the progress needed for their achievement.

Progress of students is monitored consistently by all staff, using alternate assessment information and informal assessments. The information gathered informs changes of classes and groups for individual students. Cohort meetings ensure that plans for students are regularly reviewed and amended to reflect their changed needs. The assistant principals review progress against each of the goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan within their house, to ensure that progress is being made and interventions are appropriate.

Data is used to make changes to plans or goals for students, but these changes are not reflected in formally amended plans. Reviewing and monitoring of progress against goals is not part of a flexible planning process. Interim goals are not stated in the Comprehensive Education Plan, so monitoring and amendments against these in the three departmental houses does not follow a common structure.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Academy for Career and Living Skills (PS 811)	∅	✓	+
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	