



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**The Williamsburg Middle School Academy**

**Middle School 050  
183 South 3 Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11211**

**Principal: Denise Jamison**

**Dates of review: May 12 - 13, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Helen Donnellan**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Williamsburg Middle School Academy is a middle school with 700 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 13% Black, 84% Hispanic, 1.5% White, and 1.5% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 89.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 90% eligibility.

The school is organized into three themed academies, the Bridge Academy for Performing Arts, the North Brooklyn Academy for Math and Science and the Brooklyn School for Academic Exploration and Leadership.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school routinely gathers and analyzes a wealth of data to give teachers and administrators a detailed picture of the progress of all students.
- Teachers confidently analyze and interpret data as a result of training, enhanced by effective systems and structures for data management.
- Teachers work collaboratively in academy and subject teams to plan their instruction to support students in reaching their academic goals.
- Data is used well to identify underperforming students and provide sharply focused support programs which help them to make good progress.
- The core curriculum meets mandated requirements and rigorous assessment structures allow faculty to track student progress in each academy closely.
- Students and staff work closely together to develop strategies which help students to take responsibility for their own behavior.
- The principal ensures that the school community is well informed about the school priorities and plans.
- An extensive range of focused professional development is effective in developing staff expertise.
- Teachers and school leaders scrutinize data regularly to monitor the impact of plans and revise them in order to maximize student learning.

### What the school needs to improve

- Compare performance and progress of different student groups within the school and with other similar schools.
- Ensure that all teachers use data consistently to differentiate instruction to match student needs more closely, especially highest-achieving students.
- Set out long-term plans with time-related measurable goals and interim benchmarks to improve instruction and achieve the school vision.
- Increase opportunities for students in the math and science academy to study visual and performing arts.
- Rigorously pursue absence, especially for students with persistent low attendance, to raise the whole school attendance figures.
- Monitor all written feedback following observations to ensure that teachers are clear about their strengths and how to improve their instruction.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### **Progress made since the last review**

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report

### **Overall Evaluation**

#### **This school is well developed.**

The principal has led the staff in a successful drive to establish data-driven instruction. The importance of data is made clear to all members of the school community through high-profile displays throughout the school. These reinforce the information gathered and analyzed in assessment binders maintained by all staff. Procedures have improved since the last Quality Review, so data is now organized more systematically. Regular, ongoing training and explanations of new data reinforce the intensive training at the start of the year so that teachers are now competent data managers. The changes to school-wide planning mean that the school goals for the year are focused on improving learning outcomes and show the close links between data, professional development link and organizational planning. Teachers and school leaders analyze data regularly to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and modify programs promptly. This minimizes learning delays and build students' knowledge and skills.

Teachers appreciate the successful changes in how their views are gathered to influence the life of the school. The principal regularly updates staff on progress towards the school goals through weekly newsletters. Teachers make good use of their limited amount of common planning time to plan and deepen their understanding of data. The school does not yet analyze the progress and performance of groups of students within the school, or compare its own performance with that of other schools in as much detail as it examines outcomes for grades and classes. This limits the understanding of areas of strength and where refinements are needed.

Most teachers make good use of data to identify where students need additional intervention and shape their instruction accordingly. Classes with strong instruction engage students as they participate in vibrant activities. Such effective differentiated instruction is not evident in all classes, so that the needs of some students, particularly high-achievers, are not met. The organization of academies currently means that not all students have access to performing arts programs. Strong partnerships with external organizations enhance the school's program, particularly in building students' skills to take responsibility for their behavior.

The inquiry team is examining the impact of different computerized learning and assessment programs in English language arts. The research compares student progress using the Read 180 and Achieve 3000 programs, providing standardized reading scores to give objective data. A detailed evaluation of patterns in progress and student preferences is underway to identify the potential use of each program in the future.

## **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 the student's progress over time.**

**This area of the school's work is well developed.**

The school has established a cohesive and effective system for organizing data that tracks student progress and performance and gives staff and administrators an accurate picture at student, class, subject and grade level. The benefits of extensive professional development on data during the last two years are now evident. Staff show confidence in gathering, analyzing and interpreting data and demonstrate independence as data managers. Teachers maintain well-organized binders which combine formal and informal test results and records and provide an accurate picture of student learning. Procedures are equally rigorous for special education students and English language learners. This ensures that the school meets these students' specific needs and that they make good progress. Data is clearly displayed in each academy so that students and staff are well-informed about changes and trends in attendance, academic progress and performance.

At whole-school level the principal makes extensive use of data analysis and test scores to show variations between classes and from grade to grade, year on year. Some analyses of the performance of different groups of students are made using item skill analysis; although this is not so thoroughly developed as it is at class, subject and grade level. The school carries out some comparisons of learning outcomes with other middle schools which has highlighted the need for improvement in aspects of English language arts.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.**

**This area of the school's work is well developed.**

Staff work conscientiously and collaboratively in grade, subject and academy teams to review data and plan the next stages of instruction. The benefits of close team work in using data to set students' realistic, but challenging goals, are most evident in math. As a result, careful tracking of progress in math shows a positive gain in learning outcomes for students in each academy. Support teachers show similar vigilance in monitoring the performance of the lowest-achieving students. They use the information derived to pinpoint where students need additional support to help them improve. Whole-school goals are shared and displayed throughout the school, so staff and students are clear about how their efforts contribute to whole-school success. The target for students achieving level 4 has not been met in English language arts. Data clearly shows how students achieve well when teachers have high expectations for their learning. When teachers have lower expectations, these are reflected in lower learning outcomes. School leaders have identified this as a crucial issue to overcome in order for all students to receive challenging instruction and enable them to perform well.

The principle ensures that the students, staff and parents are well informed about the school priorities and plans through weekly newsletters. These keep families up-to-date with events, issues and school successes. More specifically, she ensures the school takes great care to keep parents well informed about their children's performance and

progress through detailed reports and consultation. The range of workshops offered to them includes subjects that enable them to learn more about the importance of assessment and helps them to de-mystify data and statistical terms. The school's open door policy also encourages parents to provide the school with information which might enhance their children's education.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The core curriculum for all three academies is carefully planned so it meets mandated requirements and provides additional subjects to support the stated focus of the academy. Each curriculum allows systematically tracking of the progress of all students. All grade 6 students follow a wide curriculum that allows them to experience the opportunities offered by the three academies in higher grades. As a result, they are well-placed to make informed choices about which academy to join for their seventh and eighth grades. The subject schedule in grades seven and eight means that students in the performing arts academy study core subjects and performing arts. By comparison, students in other academies also follow core subjects but have very limited access to performing and visual arts, which limits their access to a broad curriculum.

The principal holds staff to account for the effectiveness of their work. She uses data objectively to highlight under-performance so that all staff are treated consistently. School leaders have identified inconsistencies in how teachers differentiate their instruction and are dealing with this as a priority. The majority of teachers make good use of data to plan instruction that is closely matched to the needs of their students. During the most effective classes observed during the review, teachers skillfully modified their instruction and the nature of the tasks presented to students. This motivated the students who responded and applied themselves to tasks with energy and curiosity, which led to effective learning. In other classrooms, instruction is at a whole-class level, so student engagement is poor and higher-achieving students receive little challenge. Attendance remains low due to a number of students who are persistent low attendees. Leaders do not always pursue this problem with rigor, which lowers whole-school attendance.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

**This area of the school's work is well developed.**

The administration is careful to align professional development offered to staff with the school's priorities, as well as the key issues for each academy and grade team. Staff skills and confidence in gathering, analyzing and applying data have grown significantly through extensive training in Datawise. Suspensions have fallen since the staff received professional development in managing student behavior more effectively. The current emphasis is on training to improve the consistency of differentiated instruction and this is one of the school's priorities. Teachers share their skills and expertise as a matter of routine, in subjects and between academies. This spreads good practice across the school in team meetings, informal discussions and inter-visitations. The principal and administration undertake regular, formal and informal classroom observations. They

provide teachers with written feedback, but there are inconsistencies in how the recommendations and strengths are expressed. This leads to some teachers not being clear about what they do well and a lack of sharpness in explaining what they need to do to improve their instruction.

A strong guidance team, including a part-time psychologist, supports students and works alongside other staff members to provide a unified approach to managing behavior. "Climate Control" is a school-wide program with an explicit focus to make students take responsibility for their own behavior. This has led to a significant reduction in suspensions. Partnerships with business, sporting and community organizations thus widen student experiences considerably. In addition, links with professional basketball teams provide some sporting opportunities and present students with strong and positive role models.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

**This area of the school's work is well developed.**

The approach to the use of data for planning at whole-school, grade and class level has improved significantly as a result of the work using Datawise, which is now an established part of the school's way of working. School leaders used the priorities from the Comprehensive Education Plan as a platform to develop clear and measurable goals for the school. They present these in a well-structured "Whole School Improvement Plan at a Glance" document. These goals clearly define actions and professional development. They also indicate how progress will be monitored through the year. The school-wide goals are broken down to student goals with baseline, interim and end of year monitoring. Teacher goals relate to realistic but challenging targets for student achievement in their classes and professional goals. Their professional goals lack the sharpness of the student goals and this limits the rigor with which progress towards them can be monitored through the year.

School leaders and teachers use data promptly to modify programs or systems so they better match students' academic, social and behavioral needs. This includes revising the rubrics that teachers use to improve classroom management and achieve greater consistency between classes. The principal is unrelenting in her drive to improve instruction and raise learning outcomes and uses objective data to change student groups and review teaching approaches wherever appropriate.

School leaders make sound use of evidence to highlight possible school-wide goals for 2008-2009. These areas relate to raising achievement in English language arts, curriculum, budget and staffing. The cabinet has a clear vision for the school to become a professional learning community and overcome its relatively low performance in English language arts. While there is evidence of good skills in strategic planning for the school's future, there is no specific long-term plan setting out the exact actions needed for this precise vision to be achieved.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Williamsburg Middle School Academy</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>				X	

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?			X		
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?				X	
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				X	

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?				X	
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?				X	
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?			X		
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?				X	
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>				X	

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?			X		
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?				X	
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X		

**Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?			X		
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					X

**Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?				X	
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?				X	
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					X

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>