



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

William Alexander School

Middle School 051

**350 5 Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11215**

Principal: Lenore DiLeo-Berner

Dates of review: March 17 - 18, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Clive Parsons

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

William Alexander is a middle school with 984 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 17.5% Black, 31.5% Hispanic, 35.2% White, 15.4% Asian, and 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan students. The student body includes 1.1% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 40% of the students enrolled and girls account for 60%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 -2007 was 95%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

William Alexander is a gifted and talented school, with an intensive arts program. Admissions criteria include scores of 660 or above on grade 4 mathematics and English language arts test, an interview, and grade 4 and 5 report cards.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has a very strong vision for the continued development of the school, firmly based on an accurate and rigorous evaluation of the school's strengths and development needs.
- The school has established a very good framework for the collection and evaluation of student achievement data, which is increasingly driving its work.
- The arts program provides excellent opportunities for students to follow and develop their talents, and to express themselves in a wide variety of ways.
- Students appreciate greatly the high level of support, both formal and informal, that they receive for their academic and personal development.
- Parents appreciate the openness and responsiveness of the school, the clarity of communication and the drive and commitment of staff, which is exemplified by that of the principal.
- High expectations run throughout the building, with a very clear drive to ensure that all students maximize the opportunities available to them, in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.
- Positive relationships underpin the school, with a strong collegiate atmosphere between the whole school community, and positive attitudes and behaviors from the students.
- Teachers welcome the professional development that they receive, including opportunities for collaborative planning and support from coaches, assistant principals and external consultants.
- The principal is carefully and strategically directing resources to where they are most needed and to where they will have most impact for students.
- Teachers are using data more effectively, so that they understand students and their learning needs in a more focused and targeted way.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to support teachers in collecting and reviewing data, and then using it to differentiate their instruction even more extensively and consistently.
- Continue to work with teachers in developing and implementing strategies that individualize learning and encourage student engagement, including the effective use of technology.
- Build upon the good progress to date to develop further student ownership of assessment and goal setting.
- Continue to improve the progress of special education students, in particular through departmentalization as planned.
- Continue to explore mechanisms for developing the school's after school program, to ensure even greater on-site connectivity with students' learning needs.

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.

At the time of the previous Quality Review, the school was judged to be building the capacity to effect change very well and was poised to make significant progress in the use of data to drive improvement. The principal, with good support from other key staff, has ensured that this momentum has been maintained. Systems and structures to understand student performance and progress have been embedded, resources have been targeted very effectively and the quality and impact of instruction have improved as a result. Teachers understand the learning needs of their students better, and this is producing more targeted and specific support and guidance, within the classroom, as well as through tutoring and other interventions. In particular, the effectiveness of the special education program has been reviewed and improved. Continuing to improve the performance and progress of special education students remains a priority for the school. The school has advanced plans to develop its after school program, which will enable it to take further control over the academic aspects and ensure coherence with the learning needs of the students who attend. Students participate in numerous community service activities, reflecting the school's nurturing and inclusive climate.

The principal has managed a greater focus through data, while enhancing many of the strengths already evident within the school. However, there remain variations across the school in the speed with which teachers have responded to and managed to implement these changes. While there are many good examples of teachers using the data to differentiate instruction effectively, this high quality is not yet universal. Similarly, many lessons are extremely engaging for students, while others still allow some students not to engage fully at all times. There are some very good examples of students taking ownership of their own learning, assessing their own work and setting goals with their teachers to reach the next level. Again, there is room to develop these strategies into a more consistent and powerful tool to drive academic improvement. The school's intensive arts program is outstanding and opportunities are provided for students to take a second language proficiency test. Mathematics and science Regents have been introduced, with accelerated mathematics also moved into seventh grade.

This year the inquiry team has investigated the performance and progress of a group of students not meeting the standards expected in English language arts. The students also have difficulty using details to elaborate and provide evidence in writing and reading comprehension. The group includes students with individualized education plans. The inquiry team has effectively supported the more widespread use of data by generating reports to aid teachers to guide their instruction. Work has included generating performance projections and supporting the development of an academic intervention plan to identify and service those students most in need of support.

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 very good framework for the collection and evaluation of data, which is increasingly driving its work. The school collects a wide-range of data and information for each student and is now making good use of it. Academic performance and progress are measured using a range of standardized and grade-wide assessments, as well as through strategies such as conferencing with students. Students are often involved in assessing their own performance. Common grading policies and rubrics, together with the collaborative review of student responses, help to ensure good consistency between teachers, thereby increasing the reliability of the data. The collaborative analysis and evaluation of data ensures that teachers understand the data and its implications at individual student, class and whole grade level. This enables the identification of trends and patterns, which are then used to drive instruction, professional development and curriculum modification.

The school is acutely aware of the performance and progress of student groups. The performance of special education students, as well as the small number of English language learners, is monitored very closely. The principal is also determined to ensure that the school appropriately challenges and supports higher performing students so that their performance does not dip over time. Data is analyzed to evaluate and compare the performance of boys and girls and ethnic groups. In this way, the school is very knowledgeable about trends and patterns. The principal also evaluates trends and patterns in the school's overall performance over time, as well as examining in detail the school's performance compared with its peer group. This knowledge is used, for example, to inform future goals, as well as to direct resources. Teachers have received effective professional development, with on-going support, to use the assessment systems introduced. They have direct online access to class data. Their improved use of data is evident in collaborative planning meetings and in classrooms.

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.

The school has used the analysis of disaggregated test data to identify longer-term goals for each student, class and grade. Teachers are effectively using the analysis of diagnostic tests and grade-wide assessments to identify strengths in student understanding, as well as individual or more widespread deficiencies. This in turn is enabling teachers to produce shorter term, more specific and individualized goals for student mastery of key skills and understanding. Students receive detailed feedback from teachers and generally know what they need to do to improve their work. They are involved in setting goals, although this has yet to be developed to the level where students consistently take full ownership for their learning. More generally, the principal has established, through the cabinet and school leadership team, measurable targets for continued school improvement. These goals are effectively communicated, through writing and action, to the school community and reinforce the very high expectations

evident throughout all aspects of the school's work. Communication with parents has been strengthened through regular newsletters, as well as more comprehensive information for the parents of 'striving learners'. Parents appreciate the openness and responsiveness of the school and how this enables them to discuss the learning needs and capabilities of their children.

The school has a very clear understanding of those students who require most support, securely based on the ongoing data generated. A range of effective intervention strategies and programs are available, and a part time academic intervention teacher has been hired to meet with students weekly to improve their mathematics and reading skills. Professional development is being targeted to enable class teachers to develop their skills in providing the first level of intervention and support. Morning tutoring and the after school extra help program provide further opportunities for students to access support. However, the school is aware that not all students make full use of these services and is planning to develop the after school program to enhance the potential for their involvement.

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 well developed.

The focus over the last two years has been planning and implementing a core curriculum that is data driven and student centered. The impact of this is evident in classrooms, where teachers are using data more effectively to understand students and their learning needs in a more focused and targeted way. This in turn is leading to increased strategies that encourage or require student engagement at the most appropriate level, including some very effective use of technology. However, the use of data to differentiate instruction and to provide consistently engaging instruction are not yet universally well developed. The school's intensive arts program provides excellent opportunities for students to follow and develop their talents, and express themselves in a wide-variety of ways. Teachers and students carry work through to the highest expectations with rigor and determination, with outstanding results and performances. Plans are advanced to departmentalize the special education program, allowing teachers to specialize in a content area and accelerate student learning as a result.

The principal is carefully and strategically directing resources to where they are most needed and to where they will have most impact for students, fully in line with the school's plans and goals. For example, leveled libraries have been produced, technology enhanced and additional academic intervention support provided. Students appreciate greatly the high level of support, both formal and informal, that they receive for their academic and personal development. The whole school community has a very clear drive to ensure that all students maximize the opportunities available to them, in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Positive relationships underpin the school, with a strong collegiate atmosphere and positive attitudes and behaviors from the students. Positive actions are taken to maintain high attendance levels and timeliness to school.

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.

Professional development is extensive and is very effectively focused on supporting teachers in achieving the school's goals and expectations. Each teacher's learning plan is based upon direct observation, student data and discussions with the principal. Much attention has been paid this year to ensuring that special education teachers are fully involved in collaborative training with general education teachers. Teachers welcome the support and professional development that they receive, including support from coaches, assistant principals and external consultants. Collaborative planning is effective and revolves around data and student work. Good opportunities are provided for teachers to visit each other's classrooms. A mentor program for new teachers was introduced this year, and they receive much support and guidance from colleagues throughout the school. The principal has started to engage students in providing their views and ideas more extensively, with monthly 'town hall' meetings for each grade to identify what is going well and what needs to be done to provide the most effective learning environment. The character education program helps to reinforce school policies and expectations. A new full-time guidance counselor has been hired, making three in total, raising the school's capacity to meet the broader needs of students. Extensive partnerships enhance this work further, as well as providing numerous opportunities to support and enhance academic progress. The school is very well run on a day-to-day basis, with the whole school community acting to achieve what is expected of them.

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 principal has a very strong vision for the continued development of the school. This vision is very well articulated through the plans and specific, measurable goals that have been constructed. These have been developed collaboratively and shared with all parts of the school community. Plans and goals are firmly based upon an accurate and rigorous, data driven evaluation of the school's strengths and development needs. This includes thorough evaluation of the impact of previous plans, as well as responding to new information and data as it is produced. For example the first round reading assessments indicated that many classroom libraries were not at the correct level for the students. With support of the parent teacher association, texts that were more appropriate were provided quickly.

Timeframes and interim goals are an integral part of measuring and improving student performance and progress, as well as the quality and impact of instruction. Very effective collaborative planning, well supported by coaches, enables teachers to make rapid adjustments to their teaching. Changes are made in order to meet specific learning needs identified through diagnostic, periodic or universal assessments. Once data-driven lessons have been taught, teachers are now routinely creating new assessments to test for progress and mastery, which drives further improvement.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: William Alexander Middle School	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
Quality Score				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.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				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.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set demanding, 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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				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.

To what extent does the school . . .	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?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				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?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					X

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped