



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Dr Gladstone H Atwell Star Academy

**Middle School 061
400 Empire Boulevard
Brooklyn
NY 11225**

Principal: Rhonda Taylor

Dates of review: September 24 - 26, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Richard Woolf

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Dr Gladstone H Atwell is a middle school with 1000 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 90% Black, 7.3% Hispanic, 1.2% White and 1.5% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 7.5% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance for the school year 2006-2007 was 91.1%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 93% eligibility.

The school is divided into three academies and students elect which academy they wish to enter on arrival in grade 6. Each academy covers the full range of the curriculum as well as specializing in specific areas.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Effective learning takes place in a climate of trust and respect among all members of the school community.
- Innovative professional development strategies successfully address teachers' needs.
- The school's maintenance of links with outside organizations impacts strongly on the culture of the school.
- The principal is a very charismatic and resourceful person who is supported, in her drive to further school achievement, by a strong leadership team.
- The school has high expectations of the staff, students and parents.
- The students are well behaved and respect their teachers and other adults.
- Frequent teacher observation of each other's instruction is successfully conducted in an open and reflective professional atmosphere
- There is a commitment by staff to raise the life opportunities of the students.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure opportunities are provided for all students to experience a broader curriculum, especially in the arts.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of professional development in improving differentiated instruction.
- Develop detailed and specific personal education plans to raise the achievement of the growing numbers of students operating at level 3.
- Develop rigorous systems of data analysis to monitor the performance of ethnic and gender groups, as well as the school's progress against similar schools.

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 Dr Gladstone H Atwell Star Academy continues to provide a good education for the young people it serves. Increasing numbers of parents seek to send their children to the school as its reputation continues to grow.

This success is attributable to the dynamism of the principal. She leads a team of highly dedicated and hard-working teachers who are totally focused on raising the achievement of the students. It is a school where students are welcomed, made to feel important but above all else are safe and secure. The parents are supportive of the school and its drive to raise the levels of achievement of the young people. Strong links with community-based organizations provide extra resources.

The continuing use of data as a driving force for sustained improvement has a positive impact on the school. The school is continuously seeking new ways of using the data and sharing it to assist teachers in developing their instruction. The establishment of an inquiry team has begun with assistance from Bank Street College.

The previous Quality Review highlighted issues around professional development, curriculum planning and teachers using data to inform differentiation as areas for improvement. Since then the school has demonstrated a more focused approach on the delivery of data with all staff having the opportunity to receive professional development in this area. The school appreciates that the combining of social studies and English language arts has proved beneficial in student outcomes. A key component is the delivery of differentiation and this aspect of the school's work is ongoing.

This is a school that takes the education of its students very seriously and is beginning to reap the rewards of its hard work in improved student achievement and attendance.

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 is making significant progress in the use of its data and there is clear evidence to show the impact it is having in raising achievement, for example an increase in the numbers of students reaching levels 3 and 4.

Data-gathering structures are in place. Staff are using them systematically, to identify the needs of special education students and English language learners, in order to improve student outcomes in these identified groups. The school disaggregates its data to look at the needs of different ethnic groups as well as males and females, and to measure its performance against similar or peer schools, but does not currently analyze in great enough depth.

The administration uses data effectively to identify trends and patterns and this helps the school to identify the growing number of students who are achieving levels 3 and 4 in their test outcomes. This type of in-depth scrutiny has been the key factor in identifying professional development needs and matching specific staff skills to the needs of individual students and grade levels. To further enhance the impact data is having upon teaching and raising levels of expectation the principal and her professional team are developing more sophisticated methods of analysis. This approach helps teachers to develop targeted strategies within the classroom. The principal acknowledges the need for each student to have a personal education plan, designed specifically for the enhancement of their individual learning opportunities.

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 adopts a very positive attitude towards its planning and goal setting. A wide group of administrators and coaches are involved in the process and this has the effect of widening ownership. The planning cycle commences in May to prepare for the next academic year. This allows for grade level and subject teachers to fully utilize all available data and ensure plans are widely shared. Each plan is prepared with built-in timeframes and these are amended as new data is made available at the start of the academic year.

For those students whom the data identifies as being of particular focus, more detailed planning takes place. The school’s main aim is to include these focus groups in general education initiatives wherever possible. As a result the principal aligns staff with particular skills to teach such groups so that they make the fastest progress. The success of this data-driven exercise is evident in recently improved State test results.

The staff take every opportunity to share whole-school goals with the students and the wider community. The principal holds regular school assemblies, visits academy meetings and common preparation time in subject areas to reinforce the goals. Parents are made aware of the school’s goals through the home-school agreement. During the year different groups of parents are invited to be included in guided walkthroughs with the principal and their observations and feedback are greatly appreciated. The principal makes it very clear to the entire school community that certain standards are non-negotiable in her pursuit of continuous improvement.

As part of this drive to accelerate learning, parents are informed at monthly intervals about the progress of the students towards their individual goals and targets. However, the school feels this is an area that could be improved further and has already begun the process of determining how best to tackle the issue.

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 principal and members of the senior team have become very adept in utilizing and selecting the appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of students and make the best use of staff skills. The school clearly demonstrates that by using data evidence from a variety of sources to tailor the curriculum to meet students’ needs. Each of the core curricula areas has produced high-quality planning documents. These documents are shared widely and drive instruction.

The school places insufficient emphasis on the development of an arts program for all, although there are some activities after school which include steel band music. The principal acknowledges many of her students would benefit from more exposure to an arts program as a means to widening their horizons.

Interim data allows for the identification of students who are in particular need of extra instruction and the most appropriate programs are selected to enhance their learning opportunities. One particular noteworthy activity is the initiative by the staff to adopt five students with whom they work intensively throughout their school career. This approach is very beneficial in raising achievement, especially as staff turnover has been minimal over the last three years. A system of buddy teachers has also proved very successful in driving up achievement. The principal knows that these initiatives are only going to be successful if coupled with effective differentiated instruction. While the school has made huge improvements in this aspect of their work, the principal appreciates that both effective monitoring and evaluation have to be undertaken.

The school constantly looks for innovative schemes to engage students in their learning. As a result of one such scheme all grade 6 students will be given laptop computers for the duration of their school career. To support this initiative the school is encouraging the involvement of parents by insisting that they attend training sessions.

There is a high level of mutual respect between students, staff and adults. Many of the students feel privileged to be part of the school and appreciate how it has made them value the education they receive. Positive strategies are in place to encourage and reward full 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 school invests a great deal of time and effort in developing effective ways of matching its strategies to improve the quality of instruction to the needs of individual teachers. The principal and assistant principals regularly visit classrooms and have a strong feel for the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers. Using data from these observations, the school has developed imaginative ways to develop their staff. One such venture is the “lesson study” in which a video-recording of staff teaching a lesson is shared with colleagues in an open, non-threatening manner. Attendance at the voluntary before-school professional development sessions is excellent. Subject coaches provide a wide

variety of educational activities. An effective program of intervisitation takes place throughout the year. Although, the school has not yet fully assessed how effective each of these initiatives are in developing further the quality of differentiated instruction.

Students take part in a number of schemes aimed at raising their self-esteem. For example, there is a system of youth courts for which students apply to become members. They are then trained in mediation techniques with the assistance of a community-based mediation organization to resolve peer issues that arise in school. Parents appreciate the work of the school in providing a safe and secure environment for young people. Likewise, they believe the extensive range of community-based organizations attached to the school has enabled the school to make significant progress over the years.

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 oversees the writing of the Comprehensive Education Plan in conjunction with the school's leadership team. It articulates the school's philosophy, mission and goals. It is used by senior members of staff to develop working action plans that are shared with staff and therefore owned by them. The students are also fully aware of the school's goals.

The school has a large amount of data about student progress and achievement and uses it well to set realistic and challenging goals. Staff update the principal on the progress of students at each marking period, in addition to information submitted weekly to cabinet and professional team meetings. This leads to immediate action and further prioritization. The entire school community is actively involved in reflecting upon and monitoring the needs of the school in relation to its goals. The process is a key feature of this school's success in its short- and long-term goal setting.

The school is goal driven and its outcomes are shared continuously with the wider community in order to maintain and improve on the high standards it sets itself. New interim goals and final outcomes are only set after a full and reflective evaluation of previous plans. This includes a complete examination of all available data. The charismatic and personable nature of the principal is evident for all to see when it comes to setting a clear vision for the school. Her ability to effect and sustain change is acknowledged by the entire school community.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Dr Gladstone H Atwell Star Academy (MS 061)	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 make 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	