



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**W.A. Cunningham School**

**Intermediate School 234**

**1875 East 17 Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11229**

**Principal: Susan Schaeffer**

**Dates of review: March 31 – April 2, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Tony Hubbard**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Arthur W Cunningham is a junior high school with 1789 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 0.2% American Indian, 18.1% Black, 10.9% Hispanic, 43.1% White, and 27.2% Asian students. The student body includes 7.6% English language learners and 7.0% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 94%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 60% eligibility.

The school receives about 60% of its students from its local zone. The remaining 40% come in by competitive entry to a variety of special programs for students of high achievement or aptitude: the Centre for the Intellectually Gifted (CIG) program; Enrichment; Vanguard; and Cyber Academy. In this way, students are grouped either in one of these aptitude-based programs or in the heterogeneous groupings of the general education classes. Once in the school, students may move between any of these groups, based on identified academic aptitude or need.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Teachers, in their planning and teaching, and the school, in assigning students to groups, serve different individual needs extremely well.
- Leadership secures and assigns staff and resources to where they are most needed with outstanding efficiency.
- Because they have been well trained, teachers generate and utilize data effectively to maximize the learning of all their students.
- Teachers are adept at combining lively, active learning with rigorous content.
- Because of their shared concern for the well-being of every student, all staff create a trusting, secure and orderly atmosphere.
- The range of extra-curricular activities and the high level of community involvement strongly support students' social and personal growth.
- The school welcomes parents and keeps them fully informed about their children's development in the core areas of the curriculum.
- The school provides a high level of well-targeted support to accelerate the progress of students in greatest need.
- The school's professional development is strategic and based on evidence, so that it supports the improvement of all teachers.
- School leadership is highly effective at monitoring and revising plans for individual students and for the future of the school as a whole.

### What the school needs to improve

- Include in the analysis of data the progress made by students in the school's different programs.
- Make sure that comparisons with similar schools and analysis of progress over time are securely anchored.
- Give greater weight to assessing and reporting to parents in writing on students' progress in subjects outside the core and on personal growth.

## 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.**

Arthur W Cunningham is a high-quality school, with high-quality teachers, effectively managed and supported by a high-powered administrative team. The principal leads staff strongly and intelligently, combining a clear vision of what should be achieved with great skill in securing and deploying the necessary resources to where they can do the most good.

Staff direct the school's considerable resources to amassing a large stock of information about the performance and needs of all students, whether special education or highly gifted. They use an informed analysis of this systematically and sensitively to adjust programs and to reassign students to more appropriate classes. The administration also uses data to reconsider strategies and training needs for individual and groups of teachers. The intensive analysis and use of this numerical data to lift up standards are evident in the effective work of the school's inquiry team, as it seeks ways to raise levels in English language for the lowest achievers. However, good as overall student progress is, the school does not sufficiently examine the reasons for any dip in performance over time in terms of secure baselines or comparisons with similar schools. Nor has it investigated the comparative performance of students on its different programs.

Planning, preparation and the setting of goals are effective because school leaders at all levels work closely together to improve teaching and learning, guided by both data and class observation. As a result, teaching at all levels is properly planned and very well differentiated, fulfilling a recommendation from the last Quality Review. Support for special education students and English language learners is of a high quality. So is that for the highest achievers. Over several years the school has been successful in establishing active learning, in which students learn through debate, research and inquiry, while maintaining academic rigor. The school is very effective at concentrating its considerable resources on supporting students with emotional or social needs. Staff know their students well and students feel well supported. Parents recognize this and the school has good and productive relationships with them and with the wider community. The school keeps parents well informed through meetings and report cards, although report cards that go home do not reflect the full range of subjects studied or the students' personal growth. Parents have many opportunities to be involved in the life and work of the school.

Following the last review, the school further tightened its long-term planning. Plans include definite timeframes and measurable outcomes. The school is eager to build on its present success with a clear understanding, informed by data, of how to achieve this.

## **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 proficient.**

The leadership of the school is highly competent at gathering, analyzing and disseminating data about the progress of students. Leadership constantly updates and seeks new ways to improve its stock of information, drawing on standardized tests, unit tests and assessment of class work in accordance with clear rubrics. One example is their active involvement in a Department of Education initiative to track growth in student effort and progress in the context of a special award program. Their data includes information not only about the school as a whole, but also in relation to specific groups, such as special education students and English language learners. They have paid close and active attention to students with histories of weak attendance or punctuality. However, they have not checked for differences in progress by students in the different programs and levels of the school, a highly significant matter for this school, or between "zoned" students and those that have tested into the higher ability programs.

Comparison of performance in different classrooms is now well-established practice and leads, where necessary, to very effective action to address any perceived weakness. Teachers identify variations or declines in the performance of individuals or groups and debate and tackle them energetically. Leaders and teachers are alert to any inconsistency in progress in differing strands of the subjects. They carry out testing quarterly to ensure that they identify every trend. Teachers and leaders carefully set this information against more subjective information about students' learning and growth. Teachers receive training in the use of periodic and diagnostic assessments and are mastering them well. The school has rightly identified and begun to take steps to visit other similar schools. They have compared their results with such schools and over time. In doing so, however, they have not sufficiently anchored their comparisons by taking into account the turnover in students and the effect this might have on their overall test results.

**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 practice of leadership and all staff is precisely in line with the high priority they give to the potential and needs of each individual student. All staff direct their planning to identifying potential for improvement and setting appropriate long-term and intermediate goals. Staff expect students themselves to take an active role in the identification and setting of goals and train them to use the school's software, to which both they and their parents have access online. At all levels, staff set objectively verifiable and timed goals with intermediate steps, open to checking, particularly in the key subject areas. The school is at its most effective in relation to those in most danger of failing and has succeeded in substantially reducing the number at level 1 and increasing the pass level.

Assessment and the setting of goals is at its most thorough in relation to the core subjects and is not so precise in the broader arts and practical subjects. Consequently, reports to parents in these areas are adequate but not so detailed as in English language arts and

math. Leadership is well placed to share whole-school goals with the entire school community, through frequent meetings at all levels and through, for example, the parents on the senior leadership team. All that the school says and does makes it clear to students and their parents that they are aiming for the highest standards and expect the same from the students themselves. In their search for ways to advance children's progress, the school communicates with parents very well and invites them in to discuss their children and, wherever possible, participate in the life of the school.

**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.**

Leadership and staff are adept at translating their mission and aims into effective practice, informed by the intelligent analysis of data, all directed to maximizing the progress of every student. The curriculum as a whole is broad and engaging. It includes the arts and physical education. An impressive array of athletic, cultural and other activities enhance the curriculum. There is a particularly wide range of links with both the community and the wider world through, for example, the school's contact with a school in Zimbabwe. The principal directs resources exceptionally well toward identified priorities. She flexes her budget to accommodate a reduced class size here or an additional course, teacher or support professional there. The addition of a robotics class, after special training for the teacher, has transformed the motivation of a low-achieving group. A student was eager to explain and demonstrate how to control a robot. The allocation of group size and staff support varies flexibly with the nature and needs of each group and individual, established by careful analysis and conferring.

Lesson plans are clear to every student, with challenging but attainable goals for improvement. Teachers plan lessons consistently well to meet the different interests and needs of each child in the class. They enable students to study and debate for themselves without loss of rigorous content and students are exceptionally accomplished at working on projects in pairs and groups. Good control leaves teachers free to concentrate on supporting and challenging individual students. In this, they make full use of the considerable data available from leadership and their own testing and observations. There is committed and skillful programming and support for special education students and English language learners. Learning and growth for all students takes place in a context of trust, understanding and security. "Every single day our teachers have time for us," said one student. The puts a huge effort into stabilizing troubled students and pulling them back from the brink, with the emphasis on recognizing the good in them. Clear and effective systems of accountability and high expectations from leadership underpin the staff's natural dedication.

**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 principal and vice principals have a good command of all the data and make sure of its effective use. They also have an intimate knowledge of what goes on in classrooms and hallways. They know their students and staff very well and make sure that teachers

know each other's practice through regular and informal meetings, through observation of one another's lessons and through demonstration lessons by the coaches for math and English language. They use this with the scrutiny of data across classes to identify and improve any area of weakness through appropriate development and training. The high quality of differentiation and high level of student engagement is the product of strategically targeted staff development over some years. Staff are constantly identifying and pursuing new goals.

The school is run very efficiently. Rather than operate the simplest and easiest organization, the principal has chosen a complex one, with many different group sizes and staffing strengths, depending on what data says about individual or group need. There are effective outside partnerships that enrich students' experiences through the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Teachers' and Writers' Collaborative. Other successful links assist staff's professional development, such as Protrax.

**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.**

All the planning throughout the school involves clear and measurable objectives, reached by smaller, verifiable intermediate steps. Meetings are brisk and businesslike, with clear action points and goals at the end, always directed to optimizing learning, personal growth and well-being. Leadership is willing to revise goals, if they are found not to succeed or to have unwanted side effects. In this way, for example, the school succeeded, by increasing guidance staff and emphasizing early intervention, in slashing the rate of principal's suspensions in one year. The use by teachers, supported by coaches, of periodic assessments is a key tool for evaluating the success of a strategy and adjusting course. Not content with this, once they achieve one goal, they move on to the next. Thus, now that they are consistently raising pass rates in math, they are turning to another indicator: the proportion achieving the highest grades. This is a measure of the high standards leadership and staff set themselves.

The principal and vice principals' vision for the future of the school is clear and ambitious: to have a curriculum and methodology that accommodate and challenge each and every student, whatever their skills and aptitudes. All members of the school community, including the senior leadership team, share this goal. It requires improvements in facilities, resources and even subject balance, not easy to reconcile with the critical requirement to maximize success in the core and mandated subjects. But the principal and her administration have the determination and management skills to bring it to reality.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Arthur W Cunningham School</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.

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	
<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.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	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.

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 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>