



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Acorn Community High School**

**High School 499**

**561 Grand Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11238**

**Principal: Dr. Andrea B. Lewis**

**Dates of review: February 27 - 29, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Anne Evanoff**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Acorn Community High School is a high school with 736 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 81% Black, 15% Hispanic, 2% White, 1% American Indian and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 2% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 81.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 85% eligibility.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal has established a clear and powerful vision for school improvement and is leading the school towards greater success for more students.
- The school's cabinet is exceptionally committed to gathering and using data effectively and systematically to inform instruction and improve student learning.
- The school empowers teachers to become leaders in sharing best practices and collaboratively planning for student success with a high degree of accountability.
- The principal and assistant principals provide very effective instructional leadership and support to both new and seasoned staff to enhance teaching.
- The school is exceptionally successful in using data effectively and strategically to set goals for the school, students and staff to address specific needs.
- Administration and staff have extremely high expectations for student success and respond immediately when students experience difficulty.
- The school provides a very broad and compelling curriculum to extend learning both within and without the regular school day.
- Parents and students greatly respect and trust school personnel and support the vision of the school.
- The administrative team has developed highly effective procedures for communicating with all stakeholders to track students closely.
- The school has established very effective partnerships with a variety of outside agencies and organizations to enrich and enhance student growth.

### What the school needs to improve

- Further develop the capacity and confidence of teachers to use data to differentiate instruction in order to embed exemplary practices across the subject areas.
- Further build the capacity of all faculty to effectively use technology to manage student information.

## Part 3: Main Findings

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

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

### **Overall Evaluation**

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

Students and parents speak proudly of Acorn Community High School and the high quality of education it offers. The major focus of the school is to ensure that all students graduate and enter college with the skills they need to be successful. All of the school's energy and focus are directed to accomplishing this goal. As a result, students feel extremely well supported and parents celebrate the visionary leadership of the principal.

The administration and staff convey high expectations to students for achieving "their dreams". The rich print environment, the public announcements and newsletters that are distributed challenge students to always be "reaching higher". The staff is extremely dedicated to ensuring that every individual has what is needed to achieve personal and academic goals. There is a constant exchange of information among all stakeholders. The school is successfully implementing a tracking system that compiles all student data in one central data bank and can be readily accessed to review progress records and report cards, to identify trends and credit accumulation and better facilitate the development of immediate action plans to ensure student success. The attendance rate continues to rise because of the school's careful scrutiny and attention to this data. The guidance department actively monitors and tracks all students and uses a highly effective team approach to address learning needs. The principal hired a college advisor to coordinate a special project to support students who want to go to college but who need intensive academic assistance. The principal is very skilled in forming exceptional partnerships with outside agencies in order to better meet student goals and support the development of the whole individual. The school provides effective professional development and training in using data for planning lessons and differentiating learning but there is still work to be accomplished in developing the capacity and confidence of some staff, especially in the use of technology. Since the last Quality Review, the school has come a long way in actively developing the staff's repertoire of best practices and is implementing a formal tracking system to facilitate access to student data records. The inquiry team has identified its focus group and is making good progress in providing interventions for these students.

### **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 outstanding.**

The school is extremely diligent in getting to know the strengths and weaknesses of every student. This focus on understanding “the whole person” is seen in the rigorous way in which the school gathers data on student performance from a multitude of sources. Every teacher has developed a common set of assessment tools for each subject area that includes formative and summative assessment instruments, diagnostic tools, work portfolios, and conference notes. With the development of a central data base that stores individual student profiles including credit accumulation and outcomes for each marking period, the school has been able to “readily pinpoint” those students who require additional support and intervention. This system has online access capability for not only school personnel but also parents and students. As a result, student performance and progress can be readily tracked. All stakeholders have equal access to the same student information and referral notes.. The coordination of the gathering and analyzing of this data means that the appropriate staff can take immediate action. In addition, teachers effectively use a “grade keeper” program to track student progress and take immediate action at the first sign of difficulty. Through regular and ongoing grade meetings and department meetings, the school actively engages in planning for student success using the most up to date information.

The school rigorously uses data to identify the needs of its English language learners and special education students. Based on student outcomes on exam results, the principal purchased a special software reading program to support students who need a more extensive language base. As a result, these students were able to successfully pass Global History because they received relevant support in double time blocks to ensure “they got what they needed to succeed”. The principal and the cabinet effectively make comparisons of its data by past performance, various subgroups and by similar schools in order to successfully address achievement gaps. However, this school is also a site that frequently hosts other schools that come to observe best practices and develop more effective teaching strategies. Although the staff has made good progress in developing expertise in using data to plan lessons and target learning needs, the training has not yet raised its level of expertise to one where it is embedded and differentiated across all subjects.

**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 principal and cabinet meet regularly to review school data to better understand next steps and actively engage all subject departments in setting specific goals to accelerate each individual’s learning. The school successfully operates as a collaborative team with a focus on “how to build the support systems each student needs to achieve a high level of success”. They regularly strategize ways to move students to the next level of development using “targeted” criteria and provide specific assistance to ensure that any gaps in learning are addressed. Because the school consistently tracks student progress through cohort data, scholarship reports, staff conference notes and guidance referrals, the student success rate is exceptionally high. A good example of effective data interpretation is shown when the cabinet and department heads identified a group of students through attendance patterns who were not accumulating enough credits, and were able to take immediate remedial action. The administration involved the guidance

department, parents, students and all teachers who worked with this group and developed an action plan to address specific needs. They implemented a variety of interventions such as tutors from Medgar College and developed a mentorship with basketball players from the New Jersey Nets to work with “at risk” students. Such joint efforts have resulted in “getting students back on track”. The school is exemplary in how it shares whole school goals with the community and is constantly seeking ways to reach parents and increase their involvement. Parents are frequently invited to participate in workshops, take courses, and access student information through the website. They are regularly involved in a social studies “Portfolio Day” where they are trained to use a rubric to provide students with feedback about how well they achieved the expectations for the task. As a result of these initiatives, the community has a high level of understanding about what students are expected to achieve. Parents are exceptionally familiar with the school wide rubric on what students must accomplish during their four year program before going to college. This results in an effective partnership wherein parents actively participate in an annual “meet and greet” to share with the staff the strengths, weaknesses, gifts and talents of their children. The teachers take this information and plan strategies to develop strengths and address the weaknesses through jointly setting student goals.

**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 outstanding.**

The principal and cabinet are totally dedicated to strategic planning using the most up to date information to make informed decisions. The hiring of a college advisor and a coordinator for boys’ literacy, the focus on roundtable portfolio assessment and the development of a block schedule for course delivery exemplify the effectiveness of that planning. Instructional strategies are highly aligned and supportive of the school’s primary goal of getting every student ready to graduate and succeed after they leave high school. In order to more effectively challenge students to become “critical thinkers and problem solvers”, the school uses the workshop model to develop some consistency in instructional approach throughout the school. This leads to a highly engaging curriculum and that is based on the principles of “design down planning” with cross curriculum integration of the arts.

The administration effectively encourages the staff to share what excites them as life long learners and to model that “passion” for students. For example, the school offers courses that include a Newton Club where students role -play stock market strategies to amass wealth. The Socratic Seminar provides outstanding opportunities for students to take a position and defend belief systems based on real life issues and current events. The Debating Club has successfully earned enough trophies to fill three cases and has won outstanding recognition for the school. All curriculum revolves around Five Essential Questions that pervade teaching and learning and makes the school’s programs highly relevant for young people who face many challenges in their personal lives. Teachers are held accountable through scholarship reports and semester reviews as well as regular department meetings where student progress is closely tracked. Since all stakeholders share the same commitment to student success, there is an exceptionally high level of mutual trust and respect. Although the staff is definitely committed to exploring as many ways as possible to use data to differentiate instruction,

the skill level of some teachers is still being honed through ongoing training to support the development of consistency across the subjects in instructional approach.

**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's ultimate goal is to create a community of professional learners where each staff member is a leader and effective partner in creating success for every student. To this end, all administrators visit every classroom at least once a day with a focused purpose and a strategic goal in mind for improving teacher practice. They are very successful at using data from a variety of sources to determine "next steps" for improving instruction and are adept at providing input and feedback for school improvement. There is a pre-defined schedule that creates opportunities for teachers to visit each other's classrooms and other schools where instructional practices are well developed. The faculty is currently participating in professional development training related to professional learning communities. New teachers enjoy working at the school and describe their experience as "high support for high challenges". Teachers feel empowered and enabled to succeed. Each grade level has its own guidance counselor, social worker, and crisis intervention team that provides an immediate response to any concern or difficulty that arises. Senior students regularly attend a College Summit class where they fill out applications and complete all the tasks required for college entry. The principal has provided outstanding leadership in creating exceptional partnerships that specifically align with the needs of students; notably the provision of 20 Acorn programs that change each semester.

**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 articulates a powerful and clear vision for the future development of the school and has implemented procedures and systems to effect change. The school's plans for both student and teacher outcomes include interim goals against which progress is measured. Every Friday, each department meets for 90 minutes to review student progress in achieving graduation credits and to monitor success on current Regent Exams. The school effectively grasps the importance of ongoing and continuous assessment and the need to consistently revise goals and reset targets for the next round of teaching and learning. The school created its own set of diagnostic tools for every subject area and uses this baseline data to successfully measure the progress of each student and reset the bar if necessary. They use this periodic assessment information to scaffold lessons and ensure that students acquire the skills they need to solve problems and demonstrate effective learning. Teachers are diligent in their efforts to ensure lessons are "tweaked" and that learning gaps are closed. This highly effective improvement planning process enables the school to monitor progress towards strategic goals and provide a variety of intervention options with a sense of urgency and immediacy.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Acorn Community High 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

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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	

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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>