



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

School for Democracy and Leadership

Middle-High School 533

**600 Kingston Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Nancy Gannon

Dates of review: May 27 - 28, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Richard Woolf

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The School for Democracy and Leadership is a middle–high school with 462 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 93% Black, 6% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 89.1%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 60% eligibility.

The school is one of four schools occupying the same campus. The school shares a number of resources including a gymnasium, cafeteria and auditorium with the other schools. The principal opened the school four years ago.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal leads the school effectively as she strives to improve student-learning outcomes.
- The administration has a clear understanding of the importance of data in improving instruction resulting in higher graduation rates.
- Teacher use of data is now more effective to assist in driving instruction, particularly in the high school.
- The school has a very effective goal setting process with clear action plans and time-framed benchmarks to raise the levels of achievement.
- The school provides its students with a curriculum that increasingly meets their needs and offers a number of programs to broaden student horizons.
- The school receives exceptionally good support from a number of outside organizations clearly focusing on raising student expectations.
- Teachers receive good assistance from the school's support service team in meeting the learning, emotional and social needs of the students.
- Time given to common planning in teams affords teachers opportunities to share good practice and develop a better understanding of students needs.
- Students have a growing respect for teachers and welcome the time teachers put in to improve their instruction.
- Parents fully support the principal's high expectations for involving the wider school community in improving student learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop and implement a whole school policy relating to differentiated teaching to inform better instruction.
- Ensure there is a rigorous process for the setting of goals relating to improving the performance of higher achieving and over-age students.
- Continue to implement and review strategies that encourage good behavior and attendance.
- Ensure procedures are in place for the development of professional development programs to meet individual and whole school needs.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

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

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The school is emerging as an environment, which meets the learning needs of most of its students. The outcome being that its first grade level 12 will graduate with a minimum 84% graduation rate, three times higher than the last graduating class of the school it replaced. This is a significant improvement in terms of achievement. Much of the success is attributable to the principal and staff using data as a clear driver for the delivery of instruction. The same data analysis is showing improvements in the middle school but with less of a positive impact than for the high school. The appointment of an assistant principal overseeing the middle school is going a long way to improve this. The school has a very good collaborative process of setting overall school goals and developing action plans to regularly monitor their effectiveness.

The school implements a curriculum with a clear focus on meeting the needs of its students. There are a number of courses in place enabling students to broaden their horizons, especially in line with the school's theme of democracy and leadership. A significant reason for the improvements in student achievement is the partnership with the CAMBA organization. The key worker of this group is also a member of the school cabinet. Teachers meet regularly in teams at both subject and grade level and this is increasingly effective in improving student learning. Students show their teachers respect, appreciating the hard work they put in to improving their educational opportunities. Similarly, parents appreciate the effectiveness of the school in raising academic standards.

The school has now established a school-wide focus, which enables it to set the right tone within in the building for improving student outcomes. For the most part this is successful. However, the school is still to translate this into improving outcomes for its highest-achieving students through the setting of challenging goals. The school has yet to embrace differentiated teaching across the entire age range as a means of meeting individual student needs. There is a range of professional development programs but these do not yet have a real impact on instruction in the school. The implementation of effective behavior and attendance systems are areas of the school's work still to have an influence on the entire school.

Since the previous Quality Review, the school has made progress in some of its areas for improvement. These include goal setting, improving behavioral systems and the development of the curriculum. The work of the inquiry team is advancing. There is a clear target group and the work of the team already is showing significant progress in improving students' reading skills, enabling them to pass their Regents examinations.

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 school collates data from an array of sources that includes State and in-house statistics and allows a greater degree of sophistication in the analysis and interrogation of data than in previous years. The administration uses data competently to check progress of individual students as well as cohorts. Teachers are now welcoming data to inform their instruction in a far more effective way than previously. This has a more positive impact within the high school than the middle school where the teachers are still to use data effectively to identify and challenge the highest achieving students. Teachers receive adequate training in technology to analyze data and all now record information in electronic notebooks.

The school keeps track of its special education students and English language learners. All teachers receive regular updates on these groups enabling them to adjust their teaching to accommodate student's individual needs. However, the process is proving more beneficial to the progress of English language learners than the special education students. The school makes a thorough analysis of ethnic and gender data. It currently highlights no significant difference in their performance, except some boys tend to have poorer behavioral records that influence their learning. The school tracks middle and high school data to make comparisons over time. However, the school does not yet analyze the middle school data with the same rigor as it does for the high school. The school makes very good comparisons with its peer and similar schools. They seek to improve their own performance by visiting such schools and this is proving advantageous in raising overall performance.

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 progress in this area of the school's work is very good in terms of the goal setting process and action planning. The senior leadership team, that includes both parents, students and teachers, is an effective in setting whole school goals. The team analyzes data before setting numerically measurable targets for student and teacher improvement during the coming academic year. This is aiding the school to improve. However, it is yet to set challenging enough targets for its highest-achieving students, those in the middle school and its over-age for grade students likely to miss graduating. With these exceptions, the process is most effective in raising overall levels of achievement and there now are no Level 1 students in English language arts in the school. This is a significant improvement on previous outcomes.

The process of sharing whole school goals is very effective. Parents, teachers and students are aware of them and the students in particular can articulate them at length. The involvement of the CAMBA organization is allowing the school's aspirations to reach a wider audience with the result more students now apply to attend the school than in the recent past. Parents are adamant that their involvement in setting goals and being part of

the school improvement process is influential. They have total respect for the principal and the work she is doing to raise achievement levels of the students. There is a strong home-school partnership and this allows for communication with teachers to be effective in helping to improve the learning of their children.

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

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school is making great strides to engage its students through adaptations to the curriculum that more specifically align to their individual learning needs. A good example is the insistence that all students study physics before embarking on specific science Regents courses. The school has good cross-curricular links in support of the whole school writing policy. All students receive instruction in a number of subjects with a clear focus on widening their horizons. This includes art, music, and technology and for the high school a number of electives that embrace the school’s theme of ‘democracy and leadership’. The students see this as important in making them better citizens.

Teachers are held accountable for the delivery of instruction by making their lessons interesting and engaging. Due to lack of space, teachers share classrooms and in some cases, this leads to no one teacher assuming responsibility for the teaching room. As a result, celebration of student work is minimal. The school is yet to demonstrate how differentiated instruction enhances the learning needs of individual students through a whole-school approach that is consistently applied across all grade levels and subjects.

The principal is an effective resource manager aligning her budget to support the goals of the school. This is evident from the employment of additional teachers so that class sizes remain small. Her analysis of potential budget cuts allows the school to re-align its priorities without significant loss to either the curriculum or instruction. The school does face a challenge in maintaining high levels of attendance. Effective monitoring procedures are in place with data showing improving attendance within the middle school but remaining static in the high 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 proficient.

The administration undertakes formal and informal observations as well as planned walkthroughs. The data informs professional development needs of individual teachers. The principal also determines whole school needs that align to the school’s goals. The effectiveness of this process is yet to materialize fully in classrooms, particularly with the use of differentiated instruction to advance student learning. Teachers meet regularly in teams. This allows them to share information and data, work and plan in a collegial way. Teachers welcome this development. They see it as a primary reason for the progress the school is making in advancing student learning.

The school is exceptionally fortunate to partner a community-based organization with its representative uniquely placed as a member of the cabinet. The results of this partnership

result in additional counseling support, after-school activities and programs, student internships and numerous schemes to reach out to parents for social and educational purposes. This partnership is proving invaluable in raising student expectations.

The school is working hard to improve the tone of the school by introducing clear standards of behavior. Their efforts during the year are proved by data revealing a reduction in incidents of poor behavior. The principal acknowledges this is an area of the school's work, which requires continuous review.

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 school's plans for monitoring and revising goals are well developed. Documentation shows each goal has an associated action plan with benchmarks and time frames built into the process. This process is greatly assisting the school to raise the school's overall performance in comparison to when it opened four years ago.

The school uses a range of commercially produced and school-based diagnostic assessments. The administration validates this data at its bi-weekly meetings. Teachers use their own electronic assessment notebooks to verify progress over time and link progress into their future teaching strategies. The principal uses benchmark data to chart teacher progress in raising the learning outcomes for groups of students. Those teachers unable to articulate reasons for under-performing groups receive additional support from team members or the administration. The school operates a six monthly system of student portfolios to provide additional data in support of progress. The use of this data is verification of the school's quantitative data and provides the administration with further evidence of both student and teacher progress.

The process undertaken by the school to reflect on its achievements is very good. Each teacher reflects upon his or her own targets and feeds back information to the principal who then begins the goal setting process for the coming year. Teachers justifiably feel part of the process and therefore take ownership of it. The founding principal retires at the end of the current academic year. She is seen as the driver and motivator for improving the educationally opportunities of her students. Under her leadership, the school has a great sense of purpose and student achievement is considerably higher than in the school it replaced. She leaves the school in a much-improved position.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: School for Democracy and Leadership	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 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	
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 and tardiness?			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, 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	
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