



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Connie Lekas School

Middle - High School 811

**2525 Haring Street
Brooklyn
NY 11235**

Principal: William Strein

Dates of review: May 12 - 13, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Jeffery Plumb

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Connie Lekas is a middle-high school with 433 students from grades 6 through 12. The school population comprises 57% Black, 21% Hispanic, 17% White, 0.4% Asian, and 0.1 American Indian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 61% of the students enrolled and girls account for 39%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007-2008 was 84.1%.

Connie Lekas is a center for students with multiple disabilities. It is a cluster school housed on five sites and serves students aged 11 through 21. Boys significantly outnumber girls in the emotional difficulties and autistic populations, but ratios of boys to girls are not dissimilar in the other populations served. Student disability classifications include profound and multiple learning difficulty, autism and emotional difficulties. There is a total of 40 classes and all students are mandated to be administered by the New York State Alternate Assessments, except for a few students attending the inclusion sites. There are two junior high and two high school inclusion sites where students are included with general education students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The work-study program equips students with disabilities to find competitive employment when they leave college and is well supported by business partnerships in the community.
- The eating, toileting and independent travel programs increase students' independence skills.
- The attendance teacher is highly effective in raising student attendance.
- The school is moving more students into less restrictive learning environments, so increasing their inclusion opportunities with their peers.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop a strategic plan with both yearly and time lined interim goals and monitor its impact on improving instruction and accelerating student learning.
- Connect the Brigance assessment with student learning goals and ensure that teachers pay careful attention to these when planning their lessons.
- Link the core curriculum planning to the alternate assessment requirements and ensure that it allows students to reach their learning goals.
- Evaluate the provision made for students with autism and ensure that those teachers working with them receive effective professional development.
- Develop the principal's skills in instructional leadership, particularly in improving the effectiveness of lesson observations and feedback to teachers on how to improve their instruction.
- Improve relationships between the building administration and a hard core of discontented teachers, and reduce the number of investigations the principal has to deal with.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

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

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped.

This is an ineffective school. Overall, progress since the previous review has been too slow because of remaining weaknesses in data analysis, leadership, teaching, and the curriculum. The inquiry team has not been successful in managing sufficient change to benefit students. As well as the 16 investigations the principal has to deal with, a significant number of families have gone to due process because they consider that this school cannot meet the needs of their children. The principal spends more time in reacting to situations than in planning strategically. As a consequence, he is not functioning as an effective instructional leader. The Comprehensive Education Plan does not impact on improvement, because there are no time lined objectives to reach its end-of-year goals. Students have individual goals, but often they do not relate to their assessed needs. Too few teachers use data to differentiate their instruction to meet individual students' needs. The core curriculum is at an early stage of development and its ineffective implementation has left some teachers confused. Parents and guardians of children with autism accurately observe, "Teachers do not have the skills required to work with our children". Lesson observations do not focus sharply enough on the connection between teaching and learning and the feedback teachers receive is not good enough to help them improve their instruction. Time allocated for professional development is ineffective because some teachers elect not to attend and others cannot, because of scheduling clashes. Even good procedures, such as the system in place to collect data on student behavior are thwarted because a small core of teachers does not collect the data.

There are a few strong features. The work-study program equips students with disabilities to enter competitive employment when they graduate from college. Links with business partners support this program well. There are a few interesting and innovative pilot projects such as the eating and toileting programs, which are a real benefit to students. The independent travel program is good. The attendance teacher is effective in implementing strategies to raise attendance and the school is beginning to open up more opportunities for students to be educated in a less restrictive learning environment.

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 underdeveloped.

The school gathers data about what students know and can do from a range of quantitative and qualitative sources. However, it is not used effectively to track student

progress over time. Brigance assessment is used to assess each student, but then this assessment does not consistently feed into a system to monitor progress. While there is a system for gathering data about student behavior, this is not used by all teachers. Two pilot projects in classes for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties led by an assistant principal produce good data about students eating and toileting. This data is used to track students' gains in eating and toileting as they progress from puree to soft chopped food, and gain independence in using the bathroom.

Gathering data on English language learners is recent in District 75 schools. There is some confusion about it in this school. Data to analyze patterns of performance among ethnic and gender groups is not collected. There is no comparison of how one class of students achieves compared with another class with the same population of need. A new approach has been launched to teach autistic students, but the school does not collect data about how the program is working. There is no comparison of data against similar schools. There is a system for small clusters of teachers of the same population of need to meet weekly for data training. This, however, does not work because of scheduling flaws and a core of teachers refusing to attend because it is not mandatory to do so.

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 underdeveloped.

Brigance assessment is used to set learning goals for each student. In theory, this is good practice, but too frequently the goals set are not linked to the assessment. On occasions, it is difficult to see where the goals come from. In addition, teachers do not make consistent use of the goals on students' individual education plans to inform their lesson plans. Consequently, planned learning outcomes in lessons often are not matched to students' needs. This flawed system impedes student learning. There is no focus on goal setting for subgroups of students causing concern. There is a system for gathering and using behavior data to set goals for students with challenging behaviors, but not all teachers use the system.

The use of data in respect of goal setting related to specific projects is more successful. For example, the assistant principal with oversight of the students with profound and multiple learning difficulties pilots an eating and a toileting program. Effective use is made of data to set relevant life skills goals for students in these pilots. Similarly, the key person responsible for promoting independent travel to prepare students for the world of work sets goals which help them. Students' goals are shared with parents and guardians at the individual education plan conferences, but parents recognize that the goals are not always the best ones for their children. This is because staff are not yet confident in using the teaching method adopted by the school to teach students with autism.

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 underdeveloped.

Administration has attempted to implement a core curriculum matched to students' needs, and to ensure that it meets the requirements of the alternate assessments. However, it lacks cohesion, because the content does not sufficiently match the assessment requirements. The implementation of this curriculum, in some cases with insufficient

resources, has caused considerable angst amongst teachers. An effort has been made to engage student interest and promote enjoyment in learning through the inclusion of art, technology, wood shop and music in the broader curriculum. However, some teachers resent this curriculum model, because they perceive that good project work which they used to do, such as a focus on Black history month has been abandoned. The administration has not successfully communicated the need for curriculum change to the teachers. In contrast, the college work-study program for seniors is good and it is well supported by business partnerships within the community.

The principal holds teachers to account through lesson observations. These are not sufficiently effective in improving instruction because the administration does not focus sharply enough on the connection between teaching and learning. Feedback to teachers is insufficiently consistent, and too many teachers are not using data to differentiate their instruction. The administration makes some budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions based on data. Block time has been allocated to a group set up to look at the Mondo writing program, but it is too early to evaluate its impact. There is a breakdown of relationships between administration and a small group of teachers, and this seriously impedes school improvement. The attendance teacher is effective in promoting attendance, which is better than the District 75 average.

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 underdeveloped.

Professional development lacks cohesion and coherence and is ineffective in enabling teachers to improve their practice or in meeting the disparate and very specific needs of their students. Administration conducts lesson observations in accordance with tenure regulations. However, during these observations administration does not hone in sharply enough on the connection between poor teaching and its adverse impact on learning. Insufficient attention is paid to cause and effect. Consequently, the feedback to teachers on what they need to do to improve their instruction is too often ineffective. In addition, administration does not track through how the Brigance assessment is used by teachers to set learning goals for pupils in lesson plans. Cohort meetings have been put in place to focus on professional development for teachers in analyzing and using data to differentiate instruction. However, these meetings are not proving to be effective. This is because a few teachers refuse to attend them, as they are not mandatory, and some others cannot attend because of scheduling issues which cause their meeting time to clash with something else. Peer observation is at a very early stage of development.

The induction of new teachers is satisfactory. Not all of the related service staff work collaboratively with teachers. There are some tensions. Not all teachers are confident in working with students with additional needs. Some teachers lack confidence in using the equipment required to teach hearing impaired students effectively. Serious discontent between a few teachers and administration impedes this school from running smoothly. Partnerships with a range of businesses have a positive impact on the effectiveness of the work-study program. In addition, the involvement of wheelchair vendors in school provides much needed support to families with non-ambulant children.

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 underdeveloped.

The school's Comprehensive Education Plan has long-term goals focused on improving instruction, but lacks milestones and time lined objectives to reach the goals. The plan lacks specific student achievement goals and fails to impact on what administration desires to achieve. Administration knows that, in order to raise achievement, it needs to connect student assessment with student goals, and then ensure that teachers make use of these goals in their lesson planning. However, far too few teachers do this. Teachers are not sufficiently involved in whole school planning and so do not have sufficient ownership of the plan. At the same time, they do not understand how their work contributes to whole school goals. There is not a robust system to track student progress over time and, consequently, a dearth of data prevents the administration and teachers from making immediate adjustments to planning throughout the year to raise student achievement.

Assessments do not feed well into the lesson planning of the majority of teachers to move students forward in areas which crucial to their progress. Overall, teachers make insufficient use of periodic assessments to differentiate their instruction. Activities often lack challenge because student goals are not rigorous enough. The principal lacks a clear vision and sense of direction and does not appear to have the energy to bring about much needed changes as a matter of urgency.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SCHOOL NAME: Connie Lekas School | Δ | ▷ | ✓ | + | ◇ |
| Quality Score | X | | | | |

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.

| To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . . | Δ | ▷ | ✓ | + | ◇ |
|---|----------|---|---|---|---|
| 1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level? | X | | | | |
| 1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students? | X | | | | |
| 1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners? | X | | | | |
| 1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school? | X | | | | |
| 1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas? | X | | | | |
| 1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools? | X | | | | |
| 1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students? | X | | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 1 | X | | | | |

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

| To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . . | Δ | ▷ | ✓ | + | ◇ |
|---|----------|---|---|---|---|
| 2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set 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 | | | | |

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