



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**James Weldon Johnson Leadership Academy**

**Elementary - Middle School 57**

**176 East 115th Street  
New York  
NY 10029**

**Principal: Israel Soto**

**Dates of review: May 5 - 7, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Alvin Jeffs**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

James Weldon Johnson Leadership Academy is an elementary-middle school with 704 students from kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 24% Black, 70% Hispanic, 1% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 19% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 92%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 95% eligibility.

The school is an Empowerment school. Therefore, it has greater flexibility in making resource decisions such as purchasing professional development.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school makes excellent use of a wide range of data to keep up to date with the needs and achievements of all students.
- All strategic decisions are made with students' learning and welfare in mind.
- Special education students receive very good support.
- Teachers use data well to plan lessons and identify student learning goals.
- Collaboration between staff is of the highest quality.
- All staff have very high expectations of students.
- The principal provides an exemplary role model in terms of commitment and enthusiasm.
- Well-resourced professional development programs support staff in all new initiatives.
- Clear procedures and policies ensure a settled and stimulating environment.
- The curriculum is imaginative and enriched by many exciting partnerships.

### What the school needs to improve

- Build on the work of the inquiry team to further accelerate student progress.
- Further extend the very good use of differentiation strategies to ensure consistency through all subjects and all grades.
- Review professional development to ensure that electronic records are central to all discussions relating to curriculum and student progress.
- Provide more opportunities for middle school staff to visit other schools.

## Part 3: Main Findings

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

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

### **Overall Evaluation**

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

The motto of James Weldon Johnson Leadership Academy is 'Striving towards excellence.' This excellence is now apparent in many aspects of the school's work. Its sharp focus on student achievement is very well supported by sophisticated data collection systems that are well used by staff. All staff show exemplary commitment to students and their families. All attest to the vision and drive of the principal, an inspirational figure who has been central to the school's dramatic progress.

Building on the previous Quality Review, the principal and his talented administrative team have overseen significant progress within the past year. In addition to an exponential growth in technological support for students, they have developed a rigorous strategic planning process that has addressed all key areas within the school. Learning objectives now underpin every lesson and assessment data is used to plan lessons and differentiate instruction within all classes. The curriculum units of study have been well researched and are now being reviewed. The recommendation to further develop the science curriculum has been taken very seriously, and this subject is now well monitored and supported by up-to-date technology. An outstanding aspect of the school is its wide range of partnerships. These have assisted the school in enriching its curriculum, introducing advanced technology and providing opportunities for students to consider college placements.

A reflective school, it recognizes that its work for students is never complete. It agrees that the middle school can, and will, continue to develop strong systems of assessment to underpin all teaching. It is also looking to strengthen its excellent professional development program to support staff in its use of electronic data. Meticulous work by the inquiry team is also laying the basis for valuable initiatives that seek to further increase the percentage of students meeting grade requirements.

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

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

#### **This area of the school's work is well developed.**

Data collection is a real strength of the school. In addition to the external data the school receives, it uses, collects and analyzes a wide range of information arising from structured 'informal' procedures, such as reading inventories, eight-week assessment

cycle data and assessed pieces of student work. These are increasingly digitized and form the basis of a large and detailed data bank held by the school, open to all staff and, with suitable passwords, increasingly accessed by students and parents. In addition there are particularly strong data collection processes developing within special education classes and throughout middle school. The rich data means that all staff know students extremely well, trends are very well monitored and areas for attention quickly identified. The inquiry team is now looking at reasons for the 'fourth grade slump' in achievement and possible links to gender differences. At a strategic level, senior staff members monitor year-on-year performance and make rigorous comparisons with other schools in their cohort. It is characteristic of this school that comparisons are made with high-attaining schools, whatever their location and student demographic.

Many processes are in place to ensure that this stringent attention to performance continues and improves. The acquisition of high-quality computers has now ensured that access to data is quick and efficient. To back this up there is an ongoing professional development program to ensure that every member of staff can access, analyze and act on the information they collect on classes and individual students. Staff discussions now assume that participants have accessed and understood the data on which decisions will be made. In addition, target-setting with teachers and professional development discussions are strongly grounded in the current performance of individuals and groups of students. The school recognizes that this will always be an area for improvement if standards are to continue to rise.

**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.**

All staff collaborate well. They see teamwork as the key element in their work with students and parents. Staff now benefit from double planning sessions to ensure that curriculum development and student learning targets are well explored. The knowledge and sharing of strategic goals throughout the school is outstanding. Thus, the emphasis on the six traits of writing, developed in conjunction with an external consultant, forms the basis of discussions relating to written work in all subjects. An excellent writing rubric has been developed and is shared with students and parents at regular conferences. The exchange of good practice is strong throughout the school.

In keeping with the school's drive for student success, there are strong collaborative processes assisting the identification of groups and individuals in need of additional support. Weekly meetings identify students whose progress gives cause for concern. In parallel, the individual education plans (IEPs) for special education students are regularly reviewed and targets updated. Similarly, the inquiry team is focusing on the drop in student performance at grade 4. These discussions invariably lead to modifications to the involvement of academic intervention services (AIS).

The conferences that take place between staff, students and parents are another outstanding aspect of the school. Students say that they talk about their progress on a regular basis, use rubrics to identify the next stages and have free and open access to their results online. Parents agree. This aspect of the school's work, they say, has "skyrocketed." When parents talk with staff they feel as if they are part of the team, their views are taken seriously and "teachers really listen".

**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 school is exemplary in the way it aligns curriculum to the learning needs of all students. Units of study are well researched and reviewed. End-of-unit assessments are regular and clearly understood by students and parents alike. Increasingly there has been open access to this information, so that everyone can see where things have gone well and where more work is necessary. Reading and writing are strong elements within the curriculum. Both are built upon frameworks that are consistent throughout the school and this aids communication at all levels. Thus, every class library is leveled and the common writing rubric allows staff to monitor student work and progress well. Extending the use of meaningful assessment tools in the middle school is high on the school’s improvement agenda.

The curriculum is enriched with exemplary arts and music programs, exciting initiatives such as the post-test intersession, where students participated in programs relating to poetry, jazz and photography. The end-of-year ‘Mano a Mano’ celebration this year will see the tremendous efforts of staff, parents and students culminate in a celebration of the cultures of many countries. In preparation for this, students will have studied the geography, history, language and customs of their adopted country.

There are robust processes by which teachers are held accountable for student progress. These include start-of-year discussions between teachers and the administration to identify the past years successes, points for development and overall student targets.

An outstanding aspect of the school’s strategic planning is the way in which finance, scheduling and appointments are used to further the key objectives. This year, AIS work and independent reading have been rescheduled at 8.00 to ensure the full involvement of the students. Extra professional development days have been negotiated to support staff goals within technology, writing and differentiation. It is this responsiveness that underpins the very strong culture of trust and respect.

Promptness and attendance are high priorities with clear annual goals, stringent home contact procedures and an emphasis on punctuality. As the principal indicates, “If AIS is scheduled for 8.00, that’s when teaching starts. Everyone knows that.”

**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 outstanding.**

Everything at PS 057 is designed to improve student enjoyment and achievement. Regular instructional conferences between administration and staff are backed by rigorous observations linked to teacher and student goals. New demands, such as the use of data and differentiation are backed by an exceptional professional development program. New staff attest to the excellent nature of their induction. The distinction of the training at this school arises from the high quality of its trainers. This is a reflection of the respect that administrative staff have for their faculty colleagues. Highly experienced

consultants in the fields of writing, theater and, in particular, differentiation have carried out outstanding work. This has also been the case with technology, which remains an area for development. Similarly, time and money have been found to allow greater inter-visitation between classes and to schools demonstrating good practice. Talented middle school staff have developed and integrated well as a team. They now seek to visit other middle schools to build on their own good practice.

The school is a peaceful, orderly and safe environment. Day-to-day procedures are consistent and sensitive. The care and safety of students is a high priority and supported by many extremely valuable partnerships. Links with local hospitals ensure that mental health programs and psychological support are strong. The parent coordinator and social workers have strong links with agencies which provide excellent support for crisis intervention.

An outstanding range of other partnerships assists in enriching the curriculum. Thus, links with Computers for Youth have ensured that each grade 6 and 7 student has a computer and technical support. 'Say Yes to Education' is committed to financing a college place for each grade 3 student when they graduate. The Horticultural Society provides hands-on experience within the science curriculum.

**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 consistency of vision within the school is exceptional. It stems from the commitment, skills and enthusiasm of the principal. All are committed to securing the highest student achievement. All subscribe to strategic goals that the administration identifies on the basis of surveys, data and recommendations from staff. This means that each academic year begins with a school-wide plan identifying major developments in each area of school life. Each plan has clear review points and each one is modified throughout the year on the basis of performance data, comments from staff groups and observations by the administrative team. It is this process which has allowed the school to adjust funding for special education staff, to reschedule AIS support and to create additional professional development in writing and differentiation.

Within classrooms, every teacher is eager to use student data to group students for teaching and to identify individual student needs. Conferences with students and parents represent the review process in action and often result in the modification of a course of study or additional assistance. There is a similar process for staff, where instructional conferences allow administrators to talk through targets and professional development needs. All plans within the school are clear with clearly identified outcomes. However, to achieve the best for each student the school believes that regular revisions and modifications are essential if successes are to be built on and difficulties addressed.

# Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: James Weldon Johnson Leadership Academy</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?					<b>X</b>
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?					<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				<b>X</b>	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?					<b>X</b>
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?					<b>X</b>
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?					<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					<b>X</b>

<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?				<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>	
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?					<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					<b>X</b>

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>