



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**The Alexander Humboldt School**

**Elementary School 115**

**586 West 177<sup>th</sup> Street**

**New York**

**NY 10033**

**Principal: Sara Carvajal**

**Dates of review: October 29 - 30, 2007**

**Lead Reviewer: Anne Evanoff**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Alexander Humboldt School is an elementary school with 865 students from kindergarten through grade 6. The school population comprises 3% Black, 96% Hispanic and 1% White. The student body includes 46% English language learners and 4% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 92%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 98% eligibility.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal, assistant principals and staff engage in collaborative goal setting using data to make strategic decisions.
- There are established systems and structures for using data effectively to identify the learning needs of English language learners and special education students.
- Various committees meet on a regular basis to analyze data, set targets, plan instruction, and monitor learning of individual students.
- The principal and assistant principals regularly observe teachers in their classrooms and provide verbal and written feedback to improve instruction.
- New teachers are provided with regular opportunities to visit other classrooms and receive mentoring from experienced staff and coaches to improve their practice.
- All staff participates in professional development activities to build capacity in using data to drive instruction and in using technology to track student progress.
- Effective feedback is provided to students that includes next steps for improvement.
- There is an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect among all stakeholders.
- The principal empowers staff, students and the parent community to dream big and create a culture of excellence within the school.

### What the school needs to improve

- Explore systems and structures for gathering data, setting goals and tracking student progress for all subgroups and for comparison purposes.
- Develop a school wide focus on what effective differentiation of instruction looks like to improve teaching and learning for all subgroups including those students who need enrichment.
- Build the capacity of staff to use information from assessments to measure the effectiveness of interventions and take immediate action to modify plans.
- Share explicit whole school goals with staff, students and parents for improvement and invite them to become partners in achieving those goals.

## 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.**

Students enjoy coming to The Alexander Humboldt School. This is seen in the level of cooperation and the good attendance patterns. There is a positive energy in the school and shared high expectations that students will succeed. One of the students expressed a keen awareness of the importance of a good education: “We build our future by creating it now.” Clearly, students have a sense that education is the key.

Good progress has been made since the last review in several key aspects. The principal and a variety of different teams are actively engaged in gathering data to determine school goals for student progress in reading, writing and math. They have taken steps to identify student learning needs, set targets, and establish a monitoring system with individual classroom teachers to ensure student growth especially for those students at level 2 in English language arts. Periodic assessments have been identified and timeframes established for teachers to assess student growth. However, the school does not yet sufficiently use information from assessments to monitor interventions or to track which practices are having an impact on student learning.

The inquiry team is in the process of developing an action plan in response to data to address the learning needs of English language learners and is providing interventions in reading and writing. Pilot projects have been established to extend the use of technology in managing data systems and for tracking student improvement within this group.

The principal's quest for excellence has been extended to parents and students. She encourages ongoing and open dialogue between home and school as well as regular communication. The community is also committed to focusing on the arts as another avenue to enhance learning and to celebrate the school's cultural heritage. As a result, the school is seeking partnerships with outside organizations to support its endeavors.

### 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 has made it a priority to gather and share as much information as possible about individual students. The principal has been rigorous in her analysis of student data and has met individually with teachers to identify specific targets for student growth in

reading and writing. This has been particularly effective in the case of special education students and English language learners, where focus on their performance data has led to their academic progress. She knows the students well and her commitment to “putting children first” is evident in the way she interacts with them and in the way she plans for their success.

The principal has involved all staff in “growing the school” and is building their capacity to understand and use data from a variety of sources such as state tests, periodic assessments, and formative and summative assessments. This data is the focus of grade conferences, cabinet meetings, and meetings between teachers and administrators. The school does not, however, analyze its data by gender and has not identified schools that are similar in demographics but who are outperforming them.

Teacher capacity is growing in using data to update planning and incorporate instructional strategies that make a positive difference in student learning. Through a personal connection with each teacher, the principal has built a school-wide commitment to improving student achievement in literacy and math that will enable them to measure and substantiate student growth to an even higher degree this year.

**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 School Leadership Team reviews the school’s goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan at regular intervals to ensure that they remain relevant. Early in the school year, the principal revisits individual student and classroom data with each teacher during a building level action plan meeting. The principal and the teacher examine student profiles, previous years’ scores, English language learner status, and attendance records to clarify and understand the progress of each child. The teacher also shares baseline data collected from both formative and summative assessments. Specific goals are then established for each child and an action plan is developed that includes instructional strategies, supplemental support from the coaches, academic intervention and resources that align with each student’s next steps. In order to increase student achievement in reading, writing and math, the school is committed to this “whole team approach” to accelerating student learning. The school has exceeded the State standard for performance in math and this inspires them to set a high priority on closing the achievement gap in reading and writing with English language learners and students who are in greatest need of improvement.

During the month of November, the principal will be delivering the “State of the School Address” to the entire community to share current and pending goals. She intends to describe the resources and programs that are being put into place to support teachers and students to achieve the school’s goals.

The principal has collaborated with members of the parent association to develop a plan to invite more parents to become involved in the education of their children. Strategies such as “Coffee with the Principal” meetings, ongoing parent workshops and holding celebrations such as “student of the month” in conjunction with parent meetings are increasing the number of parents who come to the school. Regular communication between home and school is making parents more aware of what the learning expectations are in the core subjects and increasing their understanding of how to help their children become more successful.

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

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

The school uses a workshop approach in reading and writing incorporating the visual arts, music and drama to reinforce student learning. The school has identified social studies as an area to further cultivate curricular resources. Teachers use Everyday Math in grades 3 to 5 in an effort to raise the bar in solving real life math problems and developing the use of math language.

Because the school has been far more rigorous this year in their analysis of the data, there is more alignment in school-wide planning related to the specific identification of student learning needs, professional development and the selection of program resources to enable teachers to accomplish goals for improving student achievement in the core subjects. A school plan is in place to ensure that teachers continue to develop their capacity to differentiate instruction for students at both ends of the continuum.

The data also indicates that students need to be challenged to achieve at a higher level. In many classrooms, it was evident that teachers were exploring a variety of different strategies to extend learning and challenge students such as “turn and talk” and higher level questioning but these practices are not consistent. Teachers demonstrated skill in providing immediate feedback to students by checking for understanding and clarifying expectations. In these classrooms, students were highly engaged and challenged to think about their thinking and engage in self-evaluation. The principal is diligent in holding staff accountable for demonstrating student growth at regular intervals and follows up with teachers when students do not improve. This is also the case for special education and English language learners.

The principal has been able to develop the big picture for her school because she has taken the initiative in making sense of the data from the ARIS software. She has seen its potential for efficiently tracking student progress and aligning the learning needs of students through professional development that focuses on the differentiation of instruction. The positive relationships that have been established among the principal, staff, students and parents have resulted in a community that is based on mutual trust, respect and collaborative partnerships.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

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

The principal and assistant principals visit classrooms daily and provide feedback to teachers in both verbal and written form. Professional development activities are based on such feedback, on teacher surveys and the priorities reflected in the school’s data.

The school provides a three-tiered approach to professional development that includes presentations, grade conferences, and individual teacher consultations with administrators, mentors, coaches and academic intervention specialists. The goal of each approach is to

develop the capacity of staff to use a broad range of high yield instructional strategies. Although teachers visit each other's classroom on a regular basis, there is no framework in which the visits are scheduled nor is there a particular focus or emphasis. Of special note is the teacher induction program which is an in-house mentoring program where eight pairs of seasoned and novice teachers are matched up to support teaching and learning. The principal has taken steps to grow a collaborative culture of life-long learning at the school and it is having a positive effect on the quality of instruction.

There are many procedures in place that allow the school to run smoothly. Students are well behaved and are eager to attend school. They feel encouraged and supported through the programs that are provided to be the "best that they can be". To extend the rich learning opportunities offered at the school, the principal has been engaged in actively seeking new partnerships and continues to explore new avenues for additional funding to sponsor special events and celebrate the school's cultural heritage.

**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 and the community have a shared vision for creating success for every student at this school. To this end, the school is highly engaged in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of its students and setting specific goals for improvement.

Teachers continue to develop their professional capacity to set interim goals, to plan effectively to meet student learning needs, and use periodic assessments to evaluate both student progress and the effectiveness of interventions. The principal regularly meets with her administrative team and support staff to review, monitor and adjust the data as improvement in the core subjects occurs. This scrutiny requires staff to track students who are struggling very carefully and to make immediate adjustments if required; however, teachers are still in the process of building their confidence in using interventions and strategies effectively. Support staff provides another level of intervention for English language learners and special education students and offer classroom assistance where needed.

The school has also initiated a school-wide focus on the use of technology recognizing that the students who graduate will need to have highly sophisticated computer skills. To meet this need the school continues to allocate part of its budget to purchasing computers, smart boards, laptops, and other equipment and to provide workshops to build the capacity of staff and students.

The principal has been articulate in sharing her vision with the community and continues to find creative ways to explain the school's goals and clarify what they mean. She sees herself as a "reflection of the people she serves" since she grew up in a similar type of neighborhood and feels a strong responsibility for creating a school where all students feel supported and contribute to their community. Her motto is "*hacia la maxima excelencia*" which translates to "towards excellence".

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The Alexander Humboldt School (PS 115)</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>				X	

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .</b>	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		

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set demanding, 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?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>					X

**Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other's classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another's instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?			X		
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					X

**Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school's plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.2 the school's plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to make 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