



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

John Mercer Langston School

Early Childhood School 185

**20 West 112 Street
New York
NY 10026**

Principal: Norma Genao

Dates of review: January 14 - 15, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Helen Donnellan

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The John Mercer Langston School is an early childhood school with 307 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 2. The school population comprises 67% Black, 29% Hispanic, 3% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 7% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 91.8%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 76% eligibility.

There are three dual-language classes, which use English and Spanish on alternate days, one each in kindergarten and grades 1 and 2. The school shares a building with an elementary school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a strong leader who conveys infectious enthusiasm for learning to students, families and staff.
- The school runs smoothly with clear procedures that foster a safe and orderly learning environment.
- The school promotes its focus on creative learning is through stimulating and eye-catching displays in classrooms and hallways.
- Staff collaborate effectively as a whole-school team and in grade teams to plan, deliver and review instruction.
- The school welcomes parents into school and works hard to engage them as active partners in their children's learning.
- Students are positive about the school and value the progress they make in academic and personal development.
- Excellent partnerships with community-based organizations provide highly effective support for families, professional development and enhance the curriculum.
- The broad curriculum engages and supports students' development with varied learning opportunities.
- The school gathers extensive data on each student to give a clear picture of their progress and performance.
- Clear systems are in place to hold teachers and external support staff accountable for the quality of instruction and learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Identify different groups of students and use data to track their rates of progress and overall performance.
- Analyze this information to highlight patterns in their learning outcomes and use this in planning instruction.
- Use performance data to compare progress and performance against similar schools.
- Ensure that all plans for instruction and learning include measurable goals.

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 well developed.

At John Mercer Langston School, staff and administration have a clear vision of how to sustain and build on previous changes in their continual drive for improvement. This reflects the school's mission of "moving from good to great". The principal's infectious enthusiasm for learning and drive to provide the best for students, underpins a culture without complacency where every adult and child is a learner.

The school has taken actions to deal with all the issues raised in the previous Quality Review but the full impact of these is not yet evident. The inquiry team is active in probing into data and using this to highlight areas of strength and those needing additional focus.

Information on the progress made by students is routinely gathered through formal and informal tests, so staff have a good understanding of every student's strengths and areas to develop. There is less understanding of how different groups of students progress and perform, as the school is not yet analyzing this data in sufficient depth. It has established systems and structures to sustain further developments in using data and improving instruction to raise student performance. While the school sets out actions to bring about improvement, plans do not define precise goals and interim measures to support the monitoring of progress. Staff work closely together to plan and deliver instruction that meets the needs of all students. They have highly productive working partnerships with organizations in the community to improve education and support families. These partnerships are extremely significant in terms of supporting instruction, professional development and families. The school works hard to involve parents in their children's learning and value their role in this. One parent described the school's approach as, "We're one big family here." Students feel valued by staff and show good levels of respect for each other. One student's view of how the school treats students, "They treat people the way we want to be treated," reflects this.

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.

The school gathers a wide range of data and uses it well to monitor how students are progressing and their overall performance across the curriculum. It has developed assessments to track the progress of students in all grades and relate progress to the

content of curriculum units. Staff recognize the need to gather data and where formal assessments are not provided they have created tools to measure progress from pre-kindergarten through to higher grades. The school carefully records progress in all subjects, including music where the specialist teacher is developing a clear system to record progress in musical performance, composition and appreciation. Recently introduced computer analyses of assessment results and attendance make accessing and scrutinizing information more straightforward than previous systems, although the impact of this change is not yet evident.

The school gathers data on every student regardless of their class and grade, reflecting the concern for the development of all its students. It compares the progress of students in general education and dual-language classes to gain a deeper understanding of their rates of progress and overall learning outcomes. Scrutiny of data by the inquiry team highlighted underperformance with a particular group of grade 1 students in literacy. The school is now addressing this through focused instruction on phonemic awareness. However, it has not interrogated the profile of its students in sufficient depth to compare the progress of other significant groups, for example, whether students with no pre-kindergarten experience learn at different rates than their peers who have been in pre-kindergarten. There is another early childhood school in the school network, and work to compare their performance is in its initial stages.

Regular professional development in gathering, analyzing and using data has increased staff confidence and skills reflected in the detail of their assessment binders. These show how they record and monitor progress in relation to the content of the curriculum units systematically.

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 has established collaboration within its culture. Staff work very effectively in teams within and across grades and with external support staff. They plan instruction this way and use individual student data to identify the content of intervention programs and plan how to use this in lessons. This does not yet extend to examining data on groups of students to identify patterns and trends in their learning. The school has increased collaborative work with the expansion of the cabinet to include all grade leaders. They now contribute directly to decision-making and ensure the prompt sharing of information with all staff in their grade. Targets for the students relate to progress needed to reach the next level of the material in the curriculum-pacing calendar within the defined timescale, rather than being precise goals relating to learning of skills or knowledge. However, teachers regularly meet with each student to explain what they need to master next. Students are clear about the need for them to practice and apply their learning. One pre-kindergarten student illustrated this by suggesting the lowering of clocks on classroom walls because students need to see real clocks to practice telling the time and the clocks are too high for them to see easily.

The school makes rigorous efforts to involve parents in their children’s education and be active in school life. An extensive program of workshops, conferences and celebrations informs parents of what students are learning and how they can support learning. When parents contact the school, teachers, the parent coordinator or administration deal with their concerns promptly and sensitively. The school works hard to provide written and

verbal information in different languages so all parents are well informed. Special events, such as the Thanksgiving meal and “potluck lunches” allow parents, staff and students to celebrate together and help to sustain the very effective working partnerships with families.

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 curriculum aligns securely to mandatory requirements and goes beyond these with an extensive and balanced range of arts, sport and personal development programs for all students. This includes students in the dual-language program who access the curriculum using English and Spanish on alternate days and quickly acquire English. The school has an effective English as a second language program and a number of students happily learn English as their third language. Teachers create opportunities to link instruction to students’ experiences and take advantage of resources in the community and visitors to enhance and extend the ways in which learning happens through enjoyable and fun activities. The students show interest in the curriculum and are able to apply their learning across subjects. In a music lesson, the teacher skillfully drew in mathematical concepts of fractions and time as she worked through a new score with kindergarten students.

The school routinely holds teachers and external support staff accountable for the quality of instruction and learning through clear procedures for showing their actions and what happens as a result. Related services providers are required to show how their actions relate to the needs and goals of each student they work with, along with the effect of their actions. This happens routinely and forms part of the monitoring of instruction by the administrative team. Students know what the school expects of them in terms of behavior and following routines. In some classes where a few students lost interest, they did not attempt to disrupt others who remained on task. Students appreciate what and how they learn and place high value on the Peace Games program that helps them to develop skills as peacemakers and provides them with strategies other than confrontation for dealing with personal issues. A high level of personal regard is evident between all adults and students and each other.

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.

This is a school striving for continual improvement in the quality of all aspects of its work. The administration uses monitoring of instruction, scrutiny of student work and data to determine professional development that matches the needs of each teacher. They are encouraged and supported in using different approaches and teaching different grades, which all adds to their professional growth. Staff support each other in their development with informal suggestions and regularly organized learning walks through the school. They recognize each other’s strengths and use a non-confrontational

approach of “I wonder...” to explore areas that can be improved. This has led to perceptible improvements in instruction and highlighted future aspects for professional development.

Students and staff follow agreed systems that foster a safe and orderly learning environment within classes and hallways. Any unacceptable incidents of poor behavior receive prompt and sensitive attention, focusing on the immediate situation and minimizing the potential for patterns of poor behavior to become established. The skills students learn from the Peace Game program are effective in sustaining good behavior.

The school has established a highly impressive range of very effective partnerships with organizations across the community. This enhances what it can offer in the curriculum, professional development and the support for families. The Peace Game initiative is part of this. These form part of the regular program and intensive support for families provided in emergencies. This is of significant importance in allowing students to remain at the school and continue their education.

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.

Monitoring progress and changing plans for students’ learning is part of the everyday work of all staff. The school takes care to prioritize and plan at school, grade, class and student levels. Currently these plans do not include goals that are sufficiently precise to support accurate tracking of progress over time. The school monitors academic progress by comparing students’ performance toward the next units of the defined curriculum rather than the students’ learning needs. Consequently, there is high reliance on the staff’s personal knowledge of students to modify plans and intervention.

The school evaluates the effectiveness of its systems to make sure it secures the maximum impact from all its work. Staff carry out some evaluation, while other work is in collaboration with professional organizations, which increases objectivity.

In reviewing outcomes from recent assessments in social studies, teachers identified that the structure of the test reduced the potential scores for many students owing to a dominance of closely printed text with unduly complex language. This led to a review of test materials to ensure that they present the knowledge or skill assessed within a fair test structure, so increasing the reliability of results. The school is carrying out action research with Columbia University to evaluate the impact of instruction in pre-kindergarten, reflecting a commitment to reflect, adapt and make changes where necessary.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: John Mercer Langston 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 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	
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?				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?				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