



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

School for Academic and Athletic Excellence

Middle School 256

**154 West 93rd Street
New York
NY 10025**

Principal: Cheryl Rosen

Dates of review: March 17 - 18, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Jean Mackie

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The School of Academic and Athletic Excellence is a middle school with 174 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 57% Black, 37% Hispanic, 5% White, and less than 1% Asian students. The student body includes 1.7% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 -2007 was 91.9%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 72% eligibility.

The school shares the building and its facilities with two other schools. It no longer has as much floor space as it did last year. The proportion of special education students joining the school in grade 6 has increased this year.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides strong leadership and direction for the school.
- The school regularly analyzes a wide range of data to monitor student performance and progress, especially at individual and class level.
- Data is used well to target interventions for students who are particularly needy or at risk of underachieving
- Teachers regularly share reading data with students and set goals for improvement which they are eager to achieve.
- There are some good examples of lively teaching, which engages students actively in their learning.
- Relationships within the school are positive, for the most part, with clear respect shown between students and adults.
- The school has placed a high priority on professional development which has been well focused on whole school and individual needs.
- There is a strong collaborative approach to the sharing of practice and a willingness among staff to try new ideas.
- The principal and her team are reflective and quick to respond to areas identified as in need of improvement.

What the school needs to improve

- Use the data available at subject, grade and whole school level to set measurable interim and annual goals to support the strategic evaluation of progress and sustain the high expectations of the students.
- Establish more rigorous procedures for evaluating the progress and impact of new actions.
- Continue to build on the good practice that is developing with regard to differentiated instruction.
- Build on the positive climate in classrooms to ensure maximum opportunities for paired and group discussions.
- Continue the work to develop consistent assessment practice regarding the use of rubrics and portfolios in social studies and science.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

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

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal's determination to improve the personal and academic outcomes of her students is shared by the whole staff. The school has taken constructive steps to tackle the issues from last year's Quality Review. The principal has had individual conversations with teachers about their needs and has shared ideas about how to embed differentiated instruction. Further professional development is planned for this year. Teachers are eager to learn, value the support that they receive, and recognize that there is still capacity to improve practice. Additional resources, plus the increasing use of technology, have supported more 'hands on' activities in class and students clearly enjoy these. The school has managed to sustain its attendance figures but continues its drive to improve them.

The school uses a wide range of data to underpin its understanding of student progress and performance. The small community works well together with the result that teachers know the students well, both academically and personally. Additional support and focused interventions are well targeted on individual need. Students know their reading levels and are enthusiastic about reaching the new goals that teachers set for them. They respond particularly well in classes when lessons are imaginative and challenging. In some instances, lessons are overly teacher centered. The principal has taken positive steps to enhance the curriculum through a new enrichment program, which is proving popular with both students and staff. She has a good grasp of what is working well and where improvements need to be made. For example, adjustments are made to the schedule and to student groupings, where this is judged to be necessary. There is a clear vision for the future but specific measurable goals, both interim and longer-term, have not been formalized. This hampers the school's ability to evaluate its work with sufficient rigor. The inquiry team is well established and has a comprehensive picture of its target group of students. Interventions to date are having a positive impact with improvements in reading scores evident for the vast majority of the group.

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 is continuing to expand its data sources so that it can track the progress and performance of students across all subjects. City and State data is scrutinized to give an

overall picture at subject, grade and whole school level. The school also monitors graduation rates to high school. Teachers use a wide range of additional formative assessments to check student progress on an ongoing basis. The program for assessing reading levels throughout the year is particularly helpful in this respect, as the school uses it to provide both individual student and class level data. Any dips in performance are quickly identified and explored further. The school uses interim assessments in mathematics in a similar way to monitor progress and identify any weaknesses in specific skills. Portfolios are well established in English language arts and mathematics. Teachers use common rubrics to promote consistency in these subjects. Similar practices are developing in social studies and science although there is more variability in levels of expectations in these content areas. Teachers conference with individual students during silent reading sessions although opportunities are missed to fully exploit this time and identify their specific literacy needs.

The school uses its data well to identify and monitor the progress of students with special education needs. This has become particularly important this year given the higher numbers in grade 6. The progress of the small number of English language learners is monitored as for their classroom peers. The achievement gap between boys and girls has resulted in separate gender classes in this year's grade 6, except for mathematics. The school has general data about the relative progress of the classes but has not systematically tracked the impact of this initiative. The school is aware of trends in performance over time and appropriately compares its performance with the results of similar schools.

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 proficient.

The teachers have high aspirations for their students and this underpins all that they do. There is a strong sense of collaboration in the school. The Comprehensive Education Plan from last year clearly outlines steps to improve performance and this has informed the work of the staff this year. The specific quantifiable goals, however, have not been adjusted in the light of the current student population and what the data is saying about their progress and performance.

Nevertheless, the school is continually reviewing data and using it well to inform student groupings. For example, the principal has created a self-contained class in grade 6 for the most needy special education students. Early indications are that these students are responding well, with improvements in reading levels and positive progress towards the goals in their individualized education plans. The school has also split classes into smaller homogeneous groups in mathematics so that the teachers can focus their instruction more readily to meet students' needs. Wherever possible, the principal tries to create smaller teaching groups so that the students can receive more individualized attention. In addition, the school provides well-focused academic intervention for those students who are particularly needy and/or at risk of underachieving.

English language arts teachers share short term and long term reading goals with the students. These are proving to be motivational, with students eager to improve their reading skills and competences. The school keeps parents regularly informed about

their child's performance and growth through quarterly report cards and progress reports. More frequent contact is made with parents if there are any concerns about students' progress towards their goals. In addition, the school offers a weekly open house so that parents can come in to meet with teachers and discuss their child's work and how they can help them.

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

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school uses its data well to measure the impact of its curriculum and scheduling on student progress. Social studies results, for example, were not as strong as hoped for and this has resulted in smaller groups plus additional teacher support. The school is using the Acuity data productively to identify specific skill weaknesses and amend the curriculum accordingly. The school has recently introduced an enrichment program for two afternoons a week, which includes an entrepreneur group, female fitness, knitting, library, and hip-hop dancing. This is proving very popular with staff and students alike although it is too early to measure its overall impact on achievement.

Teachers are held accountable for the outcomes of their students through formal observations and the scrutiny of work and data. Sometimes teachers request visits to their classrooms for additional feedback and guidance. The school adopted the America's Choice program, including Ramp Up mathematics, some years ago. All teachers follow the daily classroom routines and rituals promoted by the program and, as a result, students settle quickly to their studies. There are some good examples of lively teaching, which engages students actively in their learning. Many teachers use data to group students in their classes and provide focused support for them. Reading books are suitably targeted at each student's level.

The principal uses her broad experience to manage the schedule, staffing and resources to maximize opportunities for students. Examples include the small groupings and improved resources for technology, manipulatives and books. The school has worked hard to establish a positive climate in the building, which is reflected by the caring relationships and respect shown between students and adults. The principal is eager to strengthen this further through team building programs, which have just started. The school has sustained its positive work to tackle absentees and tardiness but this continues to be a challenge.

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 has a good understanding of teaching strengths and areas for development through her frequent classroom visits and regular data checks. She has developed a comprehensive professional development program to support her staff which has included retreats, national conferences and school specific issues. The latter

are carefully identified through data and staff discussion and well supported by the coaches. Teachers are enthusiastic about improving their practice. They appreciate the training provided and the feedback that they receive about what is going well and where improvements could be made. The principal encourages her staff to try new ideas and has created an environment where the teachers readily do so. In addition, teachers make good use of meeting times to discuss students' performance and evaluate their lessons. The small community means that teachers also talk to each other on a regular basis whenever the opportunity arises. These approaches, plus individual mentoring, ensure that new teachers are quickly assimilated into the culture of the school and feel well supported.

The school has a coherent team of support services, which work very well together to support the personal as well as academic needs of the students. Sessions have been provided on preparation for high school, for example, and approaches to conflict resolution are being integrated into the school program. Teachers feel well supported when any discipline issues arise in the school. The procedures for ensuring an orderly environment are systematically followed and result in a school that runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The school has developed some strong partnerships over time, which effectively reinforces the staff's aspirations for the students. The Tommy Hilfiger Corporate Foundation, Salvadori Program and the Jewish Museum, for example, provide good support for the enrichment program.

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 proficient.

The principal and her staff have a clear vision for the future and there is strong potential within the school to build on developments to date and secure further improvement. These ambitions are not securely underpinned in the Comprehensive Education Plan, however, with clearly measurable interim and annual goals at subject, grade and whole school level. This limits the ability of the school to undertake a strategic evaluation of progress and the impact of new initiatives.

The principal and her staff do communicate regularly, however, about what is working well and where improvements need to be made. Changes have been made to class size in 8th grade social studies, for example, to provide additional support for students and ensure that exit projects are of good quality. The school is frequently checking mathematics data to monitor progress and move students between groups, should the need arise. The pupil personnel team meets weekly to discuss a wide range of contextual data about individual students, which is used to readjust support programs, if needed. Teachers regularly check class data and amend their approaches or recommend additional interventions for specific students as a result of ongoing assessment. The principal and staff are flexible, responding quickly to areas that they identify as in need of improvement. The loss of two classrooms this year has hampered this flexibility to some degree.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The School for Academic and Athletic Excellence	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