



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**The Renaissance Military and Leadership
Academy**

**Middle School 286
509 West 129th Street
New York
NY 10039**

Principal: Qadir Dixon

Dates of review: May 20 – 21, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Stephen Walker

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Renaissance Military and Leadership Academy is a middle school with 208 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 68% Black, 30% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Native American students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 2% special education students. Boys account for 60% of the students enrolled and girls account for 40%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 94%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 81% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides inspirational and forward-looking leadership that is supporting the considerable improvements in the school.
- The implementation of clear procedures and high expectations is leading to improvements in student behavior and learning.
- The high degree of mutual respect between students and teachers creates a very positive atmosphere in classrooms and around the school.
- The school uses assessment information well to track individual student progress and to identify skill areas that require additional attention.
- There is effective intervention support for students who require additional help with their work.
- Parents and caregivers greatly appreciate the regular information on the progress and performance of their children.
- The student centered curriculum and the wide range of extra-curricular activities provides an enriching and enjoyable experience for the students.
- The high rate of attendance reflects that students like coming to school.
- Strong partnerships with community groups and organizations greatly enhance the educational experience of the students.
- Teachers, parents and students greatly respect the clear vision of the principal for the future improvement of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop the analysis of whole school performance and progress data with particular reference to differences between students, subjects and classes.
- Develop a system of specific goal setting for students in all subjects and classes so that performance targets are based on prior achievement.
- Encourage further instructional differentiation in classes so that teachers address specifically the individual learning needs of each student.
- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all lessons motivate and engage the students.
- Introduce a structured program of professional development and inter-visitations to share effective teaching practices and improve instruction.
- Revise the comprehensive education plan and ensure that agreed whole school priorities drive the subject action plans.

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 proficient.

The school is experiencing a period of considerable improvement in attendance, behavior and student progress. This is primarily due to the new principal who has introduced beneficial changes during the present academic year. Teachers, parents and students greatly respect his clear vision for the future development of the school. The high degree of mutual respect between students and teachers has resulted in a very positive and calm atmosphere in classrooms and around the school. There are good systems of evaluation and a clear understanding of areas for development. The quality of teaching is improving, although instruction does not always differentiate to meet the varied learning needs of individual students. Students do not have specific achievement goals in each subject that encourage progress on previous performance. The comprehensive education plan is not at present a working document so that agreed whole school priorities for student and teacher outcomes drive action plans. The school's inquiry team has begun research on the identified target group of students in grade 7 who need additional support in math and resultant intervention is leading to better rates of progress.

The school has made good progress in addressing the key issues in the previous Quality Review. The school uses assessment information carefully to track individual student progress and support those who require additional help with their work. However, it is not fully analyzing whole school performance and progress data with particular reference to differences between students, subjects and classes. The curriculum is now more student centered and matched to the learning needs and interests of the students. Clear procedures and expectations are leading to considerable improvements in student behavior and learning. Teachers are beginning to adjust their teaching styles so that there is a greater participation of students in lessons. The school acknowledges the need to share good practice to raise further the quality of teaching and learning so that more lessons motivate and engage students.

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 developed effective systems to analyze performance data in order to improve the progress of students. The school uses standardized tests and teacher

assessments well to track individual student progress and identify skill areas that require additional attention. This has led to overall results in English language arts and math tests showing positive gains since the past year. Teachers use item analysis well in order to examine student responses and identify area of weakness. The principal and assistant principal have a good understanding of individual student progress. However, the school does not yet fully interrogate the available assessment data with particular reference to the differences between students, subjects and classes.

The school acknowledges variations in student performance by gender and ethnic groups, although there is no detailed analysis of these differences across the grades and subjects. Single gender classes in grades 7 and 8 are used in an attempt to maximize concentration and raise attainment levels for both boys and girls. Effective systems are in place to record the performance and progress of English language learners and special education students. The school compares performance with similar schools and visits middle schools in Harlem and Brooklyn. Subsequent adjustments using best practices have resulted in a higher percentage of Level 3 and 4 achievements in core subjects. Teachers are not fully confident in the use and analysis of assessment information, although they have received training in the use of AQUITY and Scranton analysis. Members of the new inquiry team are increasing their understanding of ARIS and are cascading their expertise to faculty colleagues.

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.

All teachers use standardized tests and class assessments to measure students’ performance although there is not a consistent measurement of progress in each subject. Teachers review student progress at regular grade meetings with the principal and assistant principals. Teachers encourage all students to succeed on the courses. However, students do not have specific goals in all subjects and classes, showing that teachers base performance targets on prior achievement. Subject goals in the comprehensive education plan tend to show incremental progression expectations rather than carefully agreed goals based on the actual ability and previous performance of the cohorts. Effective intervention programs support students who require additional help with their work. Academic intervention teachers use “push in and pull out” well to support identified students in English, math and science. The after school program and Saturday academy provides effective help for students who are scoring below grade levels.

Communication with the parents is good and this helps student achievement. Although all communication is currently in English, there are plans to translate the monthly newsletter into Spanish. The school provides parents and caregivers with regular report cards and progress reports that are detailed and informative. Attendance at parent-teacher conferences is high and the school alerts parents quickly if their child is having difficulties with their learning. High expectations for all students are beginning to raise levels of progress. The vision statement reminds students that “we are excellence and demand excellence from our scholar leaders”. Students and parents appreciate the awards ceremonies and rewards for good work, behavior and attendance.

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 is proactive in adjusting the core curriculum so that it is more student centered and better aligned to their learning needs and interests. Innovative approaches to literacy include the poetry project, the "Big Read" and the accelerated reader program. These programs are both encouraging better standards in reading and writing. Dimension math uses technology to reinforce algebra concepts. The Seeds to Trees project encourages students to research biology in the field. Teacher assessments and standardized tests ensure that meaningful data is available to measure student progress. A wide and expanding range of extra-curricular activities provides an enriching and enjoyable experience for the students. Clubs after school include such activities as tie dying, chess, drama, music, dance as well as a range of sporting activities. The "Shooting Stars Program" provides a week of activities and visits for the student.

Many of the teachers are engaging and motivating the students in the lessons. There is now limited formal teaching to the whole class and increased organization of students into groups and pairs so that they can work at their own pace. However, the teachers are not fully differentiating instruction by using the assessment data so that they can address more specifically the individual learning needs of each student. In other aspects, teachers plan lessons well and encourage students to take an active part in lessons. The high degree of mutual respect between students and teachers leads to a very positive atmosphere in classrooms and around the school. There is good quality display work in some classrooms that creates a stimulating environment for learning. Students enjoy the lessons and really appreciate teachers "who give you time, connect with you and want to help you." However, not all teachers have fully developed well-honed instructional techniques and management of students. This means that the teaching in some lessons does not always motivate and engage the students. A small but significant number of teachers do not have sufficient, specialist subject knowledge as they are not certified in their teaching area. The high rate of attendance is a reflection of the fact that students like coming to school and there are effective systems for monitoring absences. Students value the opportunity to become "a 100% attendance star".

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 proficient.

All teachers have a formal observation carried out by the principal or assistant principal, coupled with detailed, diagnostic feedback at least once per year. There are regular "snapshots" made by the principal, and teachers adopt an open approach to advice and support. Teachers comment that "the principal is incisive regarding their abilities and is eager for them to develop as practitioners." Teachers are not fully using guided inter-visitations and "learning walks" with their colleagues in order to share good classroom practice within and across subject areas. There are opportunities for teachers to meet during common planning periods and share teaching materials. However, there is a lack

of a structured program of professional development. In addition, the school does not use best practice models to raise further the quality of teaching and learning. New teachers gain effective support with both planning and instruction. The implementation of very clear procedures and expectations has led to improvements in student behavior and learning. The calm atmosphere around the school supports student learning and progress well. A range of guidance and student services assists successfully in students' academic and personal development. Additional specialists from St Luke's Hospital support the school guidance councilors effectively. Connect with Kids provides additional guidance and leadership training for the students. Strong partnerships with community groups and organizations greatly enhance the educational experience of the students. Publicolor support the students in the painting of the corridors, while the HOPE program awards financial incentives for good performance in examinations. Riverbank State Park provides an extensive range of sporting activities. Many students attend these activities.

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 provides inspirational and forward-looking leadership that is supporting considerable improvements in the school. One teacher commented, "The principal is striving for excellence and is able to motivate both the teachers and students." There is significant evidence of specific improvements in student progress, attendance and behavior in the school. Teachers, parents and students greatly respect the clear vision of the principal for the future improvement of the school. However, the current comprehensive education plan is not a working document and does not reflect the key issues in the school. The school acknowledges the need to ensure that agreed whole school priorities drive action plans within a revised school improvement plan. There are clear whole school targets for raising achievement in English and math, but leaders base these targets on incremental progression rather than accurate predictions of aspirational student progress in relation to their previous performance. Goals for teachers are not sufficiently explicit or challenging because individual students do not have specific target grades.

Teachers are using periodic assessments to confirm student progress and outcomes, as well as item analysis to highlight areas for development. Regular assessments identify any underperformance of students and the school implements intervention strategies quickly in order to support students who are at risk of not reaching their required levels. The school is continually reviewing progress and adjusting strategies in the light of assessment information. Good examples are seen in the smaller classes for lower attaining students and single gender classes in grades 7 and 8 which are beginning to raise achievement levels in literacy. The accelerated reader program was extended to all grades after the pilot in grade 7 led to considerable gains in student reading levels. Effective systems and procedures are beginning to effect change and the levels of achievement are rising across the school.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Renaissance Military and Leadership Academy	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score			X		

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

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

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

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?		X			
2.2 focus on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area?			X		
2.3 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?			X		
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?			X		
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?			X		
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X		

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

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?			X		
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?			X		
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?			X		
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?		X			
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?			X		
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X		

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

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?			X		
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					
			X		

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