



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Writers Today and Leaders Tomorrow

**Middle School 326
401 West 164 Street
New York
NY 10032**

Principal: Sharon Weissbrot

Dates of review: October 22 - 23, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Richard Woolf

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Writers Today and Leaders Tomorrow is a middle school with 464 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 20% Black and 80% Hispanic students. The student body includes 34% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance is 89.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 95% eligibility.

The school shares the building with another middle school. The outside of the building is currently undergoing major reconstruction.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a strong and forceful leader.
- The principal is supported by assistant principals and staff who are determined to improve student opportunities.
- The students' behavior is exemplary and they now enjoy their school.
- The parents are appreciative of the school's newfound ability to communicate and share with them.
- The school makes very good use of support services to assist in meeting the students' personal and academic needs.
- The school's attendance rate continues to rise and remains a high priority of the school.
- The school effectively uses data to identify and support its special education students and English language learners.
- There is a good atmosphere of respect among staff and students.
- The principal is a skilled resource manager and has improved the school's level of resources successfully.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure the entire staff is involved in exploring differentiation techniques to support student learning.
- Continue to enhance the performance of all students, particularly in math, through close analysis of individual student strengths and weaknesses.
- Involve students and their parents in the process of setting targets and monitoring progress.
- Continue to monitor the effectiveness of single-sex groupings and analyze ethnic data more effectively.

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.

This school has undergone major changes. The principal and her staff have made significant efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in the case of the special education students and English language learners. Effective strategies are in place to drive the improvement agenda, for example, teaching in single sex classes. The school is aware of the need to monitor the effectiveness of this and other programs. There has been a complete turnaround in student attitudes that is reflected by the lesser number of suspensions and the increase in student attendance.

The school has an almost completely new teaching staff and collectively the faculty is making giant strides to improve the learning opportunities of the students. A good professional development program and the use of external consultants have supported this process.

The use of data has assisted teachers in realigning their teaching strategies. The school recognizes that further work is required to continue to drive up achievement through closer analysis of student strengths and weaknesses and setting improvement targets for students. The administration acknowledges that the biggest challenge will be for staff to teach using a range of differentiated techniques. The staff works together collaboratively and the entire school has a sense of purpose and direction. The students appreciate the caring nature of the staff and that they want them to succeed in life. The school has made progress in a short period.

Since the last Quality Review, the school has made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement. These include improved attendance rates, the reallocation of equitable teaching space within the campus and a decrease in the number of suspensions due to the implementation of a behavioral policy. The inquiry team has five members and is already analyzing data to identify students who require special attention in math.

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.

Over the last fourteen months, the principal has moved the school forward in its use of data. Prior to her arrival, the school did very little analysis of data. The school now uses data more proficiently by reviewing results from State tests and internal assessments. The

gains report is used to determine progress of individual students and teacher effectiveness. The school has a good understanding of the performance and progress of special education students and English language learners. For example, the school has carefully analysed data that shows that these groups made better progress when taught in smaller groups. The administration sees this principle as critical in its effort to improve overall instruction in general education classes.

The school has established single-sex learning groups to respond to differences in boys' and girls' performance. These smaller, more effective teaching groups arose from data analysis. To measure the effectiveness of this initiative, an evaluative process is planned for next January. The school does not yet look closely enough at the data generated to assess the needs of the two ethnic groups that populate the school. The administration acknowledges this as an area for development. Data is analyzed in detail to enable comparisons with similar schools and the school's previous performances. This is becoming a motivational factor for the whole school community to raise overall achievement, particularly in math. The teachers have moved a long way in their use of data. They are pleased by the way the principal has identified new ways of assessing individual students. They now feel more proficient in using data to identify student strengths and weaknesses.

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 school, under strong leadership from the principal, has improved its overall goal setting procedures. It now has very clear goals for English language arts, math and attendance with measurable outcomes. Very challenging percentage increases have been set by the school in these areas, which further reflects the school's ability to challenge itself and improve. The senior leadership team, which includes parents, shares these goals with the entire staff. Data is used extensively to identify and support special education students, English language learners and those at risk of not improving their overall grades. Some students have the opportunity to receive bilingual instruction. As a result of setting individual targets for these groups, there was a 75% increase in the grade outcomes during last academic year. The cabinet reviews the school's progress relative to its goals monthly with a more rigorous analysis planned to take place each six months.

The school is seeking better ways to share its goals with the wider community. The principal's own newsletter to staff, "Sharon's Corner," is a very good example of how to share the message of school improvement. Parents see the sharing of high expectations as a reason the school is improving its standing within the community. The school is working hard to keep parents informed of their child's progress and to involve them in the school. Parents appreciate these efforts, feel well informed and more a part of the school's improvement than in the past. The students are aware of the changes made in the recent past. They now feel more engaged and appreciated by being included in the school's planning process through the recently established student council.

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 aligns itself with all aspects of the mandatory curriculum. It has a particular focus on the development of literacy skills to improve writing across the curriculum. The school considers this a key feature in its effort to move students to higher levels of achievement. The new strategies to improve math outcomes, which include the appointment of new math teachers and more group and individualized learning projects, is also a key developmental point. The impact of these strategies on student progress has yet to be analyzed.

The school has decided, based on data evidence from teacher and student surveys, to split the teaching of physical education into single-sex groups. For example, when the boys are being taught physical education the girls are receiving instruction in the arts program. The program includes fine art, music and graphic design. The latter uses the latest computer design software and the work produced is of the highest quality. This continues the school’s focus on smaller teaching groups.

The principal has had to develop an almost completely new staff since taking over the school. In order to achieve continuity she meets regularly with staff and lays out very clear guidelines on what is expected of them. She allows them a great deal of autonomy but holds them accountable for ensuring that students are challenged, engaged and given every opportunity to progress. With so many new and young teachers, the principal acknowledges this is a “work in progress”. Therefore, plans are being developed to strengthen instruction through better use of differentiation.

The principal is an exceptional resource manager and the entire staff acknowledges this as a real strength. On her arrival, the school lacked virtually everything it needed to operate successfully. This is no longer the case and the school is now equipped to fulfill its function as a place of learning. The students are aware of the need to try hard in order to be successful and evidence shows they are now more engaged in their lessons. They have a great deal of respect for their teachers and principal and there is always an adult prepared to help them. Student behavior has improved and is now a strong feature of the school.

The data suggests the school’s attendance policy is producing rates higher than similar schools. The students are aware of the need to attend regularly and acknowledge, “Regular attendance means you do not slip behind as the teachers here are becoming more demanding.” Parents are very anxious for their children to attend regularly in order to enhance their learning opportunities and appreciate the efforts the school makes in its pursuit of full attendance.

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.

The school has seen an almost complete turnover in its teaching force during the last fourteen months. This presented a need for the principal to implement extensive

professional development, as many of the teachers were new to teaching. To support this drive, staff have been paid to attend professional development sessions. The use of outside consultants to provide additional support to teachers by modeling lessons and supporting lesson planning is proving very positive. In the classes where this type of support is given, there is evidence to demonstrate its effectiveness through increased student outcomes. Teachers frequently carry out intervisitations, which are invaluable with so many new staff. Collaboration and teamwork is a strength of the school, as indicated by the support new teachers receive through mentors and “buddies”.

Formal observations take place at regular intervals, with a larger number of informal observations regularly carried out as well. The administration uses a color-coded chart to assist them in monitoring teacher progress and teachers’ mastery of specific skills. This has provided very valuable feedback to staff.

The school’s support services provide high-quality assistance to students. Large numbers of students demonstrate significant emotional and social issues. Through the effective use of the guidance counselor, social workers and campus-wide health facilities, students receive assistance to achieve their academic goals. The school uses a number of strategies to ensure its smooth operation. The administration has detailed data showing the number of disciplinary incidents has decreased as teachers more effectively engage students in lessons. There is a growing use of outside organizations to support the school, particularly through after school activities. The principal is constantly looking to improve the support she receives to further impact upon student outcomes.

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 school’s efforts to monitor and revise goals are emerging. Staff are now more aware of the need to challenge themselves to improve their work by continually using data. The principal has established very challenging goals and regularly revisits them to determine the school’s progress toward meeting them. The administration meets monthly with teachers and using their data binders determines the progress they are making in moving students forward. During these meetings, adjustments are made to individual student and teacher targets. The school uses a number of interim assessments and periodic tests to monitor progress. Next-step learning goals for students emerge from these assessments. Parents are given regular updates of the progress of their children.

The outcome of periodic assessments and other indicators feed into the school’s decision-making process. From this data, the principal has been able to make strategic decisions around staffing issues. One outcome has been the establishment of an almost entirely new math team. The school is establishing mechanisms for the development of ongoing planning by taking into consideration more of the views of the school’s constituents. The principal sees this as a very positive step forward as she looks to find ways to involve parents and students in setting their own goals. The school, parents and students share the principal’s vision of the school as a beacon institution within the local community and strongly believe in her capacity to deliver that vision.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Writers Today and Leaders Tomorrow (PS 326)	△	▶	✓	+	◇
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 . . .	△	▶	✓	+	◇
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 . . .	△	▶	✓	+	◇
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 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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X		