



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**The Collaborative Academy of Science,
Technology and Language Arts Education**

**Middle School 345
220 Henry Street
New York
NY 10002**

Principal: Mauricière de Govia

Dates of review: December 10 - 11, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Chris Andrews

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Collaborative Academy of Science, Technology and Language Arts (CASTLE school) is a middle school with 279 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 18% Black, 58% Hispanic, 3% White, and 21% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 94.6%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 87% eligibility.

The CASTLE school was opened by the current principal in September 2006 and shares its building and floor space on the first and second floors with two other schools. The school also shares the library, gymnasium, auditorium and cafeteria, but effective scheduling ensures that this does not impact negatively on student performance and behavior.

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Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The collection and utilization of student data to set instructional goals for teachers and progress goals for students is very good.
- There is a strong collaborative culture in the school that produces high quality dialogue and reflection among colleagues.
- The support provided for special education and English language learners allows them to make very good progress.
- Expectations are very high, are effectively conveyed to students and their parents, and contribute positively to ongoing student performance.
- Students enjoy their classes because they feel challenged by their teachers and well prepared for the next stages in their education.
- The management of all resources is very effective and supports both teachers and students in reaching their goals.
- Relationships within the school are very good, and students feel that they are respected and their opinions valued by their teachers.
- Administrators have a very good understanding of the strengths and needs of instruction and provide differentiated professional development to help staff meet their goals.
- The process of monitoring and review is very strong, and allows the leadership to respond quickly to changing needs within the school.
- The principal and leadership have a very clear vision for the school's future in developing lifelong learners which underpins all of their work and planning.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop further teachers' expertise in the effective utilization of data in order to expand their teaching repertoire in terms of differentiated instruction.
- Develop the predictive tracking of students to ensure that they make anticipated annual progress across all three grades.
- Ensure that there is a high degree of consistency between and within departments in terms of grading policies.
- Enhance the climate for learning within the school by displaying student work in classrooms and in the halls, so providing exemplar work to which students can aspire.

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.

The CASTLE school is highly regarded by the community it serves. Having been created in “response to a community need”, it is rightly seen as an institution with high expectations of its students where the teachers “give us hard, challenging work”. Students enjoy coming to school because they feel safe and are treated as young people with opinions to be valued. The principal has established among students a belief that the CASTLE school is an important step in their life-long learning. They already see themselves as “college bound” and many have taken the opportunities provided by the Youth Leadership program to visit colleges and experience a little of college life.

Since the last Quality Review in late March 2007 the school has made particular progress in addressing the issue of improving assessment in science and social studies through the development of skills-based tests and rubrics. Other work is ongoing and requires time to embed, and the school recognizes that there are other areas for development. These include continued work on the teachers’ data handling skills to improve further the quality of differentiated instruction, in the consistent grading of work, and the enhancing of the school’s learning environment through displays of assessed student work.

The schools’ management of data is very good and the responses of the leadership to data analysis are flexible in terms of rescheduling and the modification of teacher plans and goals. Data is being used to provide long-term goals for students from early in grade 6 so that the school is able to measure how much progress each student has made and so evaluate which students reach their potential. The school is not yet using predictive assessments to measure whether students make their anticipated progress during the year. There is a very clear appreciation of what good instruction is, and there are development plans, structured around the Californian Standards for the Teaching Profession, to enable teachers to enhance the quality of their instruction. The inquiry team has identified its target group of students and has collected appropriate data. It is now in the process of analyzing this data to investigate instructional strategies which are transferable across content areas, with a particular focus on mathematics.

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 collection and utilization of student data to set instructional goals for teachers and progress goals for students is very good. Scores from the elementary schools as well as testing in the school provide evidence both for placing students in groups and as a

baseline for tracking progress. The data for students include a review of their learning styles to enable teachers to differentiate their instruction more appropriately. Report card data is collected and analyzed by the principal so that she is aware of trends as well as of the performance of all classes and students. The principal also collects individualized teacher data reports to determine the success each teacher has in moving his or her students forward. This allows her to set the goals for both the class and the teacher.

The students in need of particular support, including special education students and English language learners, are reviewed and tracked in the same way. Consequently, the school has the same expectations of progress of all students, albeit at different levels. As a result, these students make very good progress, particularly the special education students. Data is analyzed in terms of gender. The analysis has shown that girls' skills in mathematics and boys' skills in literacy, especially Black boys, are areas for concern. This has led to the provision of books and magazines for boys and the linking of the CHAMPS sports program to additional academic work in these areas.

The principal is able to compare students' progress over time because she and a number of her teachers came from the school which the CASTLE school replaced, as did approximately one third of last year's grade 8. This analysis shows increased test scores by these students. The principal compares progress with similar schools to learn from others' successful practice. When she identified good progress in one of the peer schools, a math lab site session was held with teachers from that school to observe their practice. Teachers are used to working with data but the school has identified a need to develop further teachers' expertise in order to expand their teaching repertoire in terms of more targeted differentiated instruction of the school's subgroups.

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.

Goal setting is of very high quality, specifically because of the way in which the principal works with all the teachers. After analyzing past scores for each teacher's class, she compares the progress with other classes in the grade and against the previous year's progress. These individual class goals are then aggregated for the grade and also all grades aggregated for the school. This system is sophisticated and produces much more meaningful goals than usually found. As a result goal setting is a shared experience in grade and subject meetings, with discussions about the amount of progress students can be expected to make as well as about the strategies to deliver success. Teachers use the analysis of test results and their own quizzes to devise plans for individual students, to revise their curriculum maps and to target specific skill areas. Students are involved directly through conferencing periods and are able to discuss their own goals, both short and longer term.

Special education students and English language learners make very good progress due to targeted support. There are goals for the number of students who will transition out of special education or from the collaborative team teaching classes. The transitions are usually very successful because of the support from teachers and a "buddy" to help them settle into a new class. The data now available from students' records and the analysis of teacher performance allows the school to track student progress over time. Some of the data is from teachers' own grading of student work. There is a school grading policy but there is not yet complete consistency between and within departments in terms of grading.

The school effectively conveys its very high expectations to students and their parents, who contribute positively to ongoing student performance. Parents support this approach and appreciate that they are kept well informed of their children's progress. There are many opportunities for parents to share information with teachers about their children and the newsletter "Castle Connections" is published monthly, informing parents of events or grading rubrics. As a result there is a genuine feeling among parents that they are part of their children's whole learning experience and they therefore support the school strongly. This involvement has an impact on attendance which is very good. As one parent explained, "Everything is collaborative and has enhanced his education."

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.

Students enjoy their classes because they are challenged by their teachers and well prepared for the next stages in their education. One commented that the school, "assures you that you will have a future after you leave." Students particularly enjoy group work and hands-on activities, but recognize that there are some things "we just have to learn". "Urban Advantage" adds to student engagement through scientific investigation lab site activities in different City museums. The school prepares students for high school, with opportunities for higher achievers to take Regents examinations in living environment and algebra in grade 8, and with test preparation for those who will take the examination in grade 9. Most teachers plan differentiated instruction and adopt a variety of strategies to address students' different learning styles to ensure instruction is appropriate for each of them. However, the principal recognizes that the closer focus on data is providing a new lens through which to plan differentiation with additional sophistication. There is not yet a systematic approach to displaying student work in classrooms and in the halls to enhance the learning environment and provide exemplars of work to which students can aspire.

The management of all resources is very effective and supports both teachers and students in reaching their goals. The hiring of an extra administrator with a special focus on special education has reduced the ratio of administrators to teachers and helped develop teachers' sensitivity to the needs of these students. Relationships within the school are very good. Students feel that they are respected and their opinions are valued. The use of enrichment periods to run the school radio or produce the school play allows students and teachers to interact in a different context from the classroom and this is instrumental in developing mutual respect. The expectation is that students will come to school and students respond positively. Daily telephone calls for absence and celebrations and rewards for good attendance reinforce the school's expectations.

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.

From regular and focused observations, administrators have developed a very good understanding of teachers' strengths and areas in need of improvement. Consequently, they provide differentiated professional development to help staff meet their goals. This

includes opportunities for cross-curricular intervisitations and the use of video recording to help teachers reflect more easily on their own practice. New teachers are well supported with a mentor for their first year, and through the use of the Californian Standards for the Teaching Profession. The school uses this framework to inform pedagogical discussions and to structure the new teachers' professional development. The strong collaborative culture in the school produces high quality dialogue and reflection among colleagues. Consequently teachers provide generally engaging instruction and are enabled to meet their own goals as established with the principal.

The links with outside entities and community-based organizations are very strong. The school sees them as essential to "developing the whole child" as well as providing opportunities and challenges they would otherwise not have access to. The "college bound" tour is a link to New York University while "Operational Explorer" allows for team building activities in an overnight upstate trip. In school there are opportunities to be involved in journalism and public speaking. Some students are peer mediators, using their skills to help resolve issues of bullying. The Youth Leadership program and visits to colleges foster the view that the CASTLE school is one important step on the way to college. Parents and students rightly regard the breadth of these opportunities for personal development as a strength of the school.

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

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The process of monitoring and review is very strong, and allows the leadership to respond quickly to the ongoing and changing needs within the school. The Comprehensive Education Plan provides the overarching framework for school development. It is revisited monthly and provides the starting point for each full year's evaluation. In this way the school leadership team and the principal ensure that the strategic planning is kept under review. Grade, subject and student goals are regularly reviewed at interim check points provided by the end of each marking period. These reviews focus on interim testing data and teachers' own observations, resulting in changes to plans or new intervention strategies. The system to predict each student's anticipated achievement and so track progress effectively is new and so not fully established. Data analysis showing students performing better in math but improving more rapidly in English language arts, has led to the inquiry team study on effective teaching methodology. As a result, the school has increased independent reading time each day is the solution to the need to bolster Level 3 and 4 students in English language arts. Teachers' own instructional goals are similarly reviewed and, although this is currently twice a year formally, the process is ongoing and carefully linked to discussions about resources and scheduling. Additional in-school support for both math and English language arts is scheduled in advance of the state tests, with pull-out from music or Spanish classes being arranged where necessary.

The principal and leadership have a very clear vision for the school's future in developing lifelong learners in "a genuine collaborative and learning institution". This and the school's motto "Together we aspire. Together we achieve" underpin all of their work and planning, and is exemplified in the weekly "Castle Courier" to staff and the "Castle Connections" for parents which draw all members of the community together. The school is still fairly new, and is housed in a building with a turbulent history, but the members of the leadership team have shown in a very short time that they possess both the drive and capacity to realize its vision.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Collaborative Academy of Science	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 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	