



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Author's Academy

Elementary School 063

**1260 Franklin Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Reinaldo Diaz-Lens

Dates of review: March 14 - 17, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Paul Smith

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Author's Academy is an elementary school with 482 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 60% Hispanic, 39% Black, and 1% other students. The student body includes 28% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 91.0%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 93% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's drive has ensured a shared vision of continuously improving students' achievement.
- The school is very ambitious for the success of every student and the whole community shares its high expectations.
- Teachers feel responsible and are held accountable for the progress of their students.
- School leaders use data extremely effectively to inform them of the next stages in the schools' development.
- Recent changes in the curriculum have brought about improvements in the progress of those students who had previously performed less well.
- Students are well informed about what they need to do to improve their work and their parents are informed of how to help.
- Carefully planned and well-targeted differentiated instruction contributes significantly to students' progress.
- Teachers use data well to improve the learning of their classes and of individual students within them.
- Very frequent feedback from classroom observations has improved teaching with a beneficial impact on students' outcomes.
- Despite the physical limitations, students behave well and feel safe in an exceptionally well-run school.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop a clear vision of school development, so reforms can be strategically planned and rigorously tested before implementation.
- Ensure that whole school goals are communicated clearly to parents.
- Broaden the curriculum to allow students greater opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills, particularly in science and social studies.
- Engage students' interest still further by seeking effective partnerships to provide a greater number of recreational activities after school.

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 well developed.

At Author's Academy, every student is known well, as is the standard of his or her work. The use of evidence to track students' progress is extremely good and students know exactly what they have to do to improve. As standards are very high, this is often demanding. Nevertheless, the school has in place many means to help students and an increasing proportion meet the school's expectations of them.

Reform, based on evidence, is at the heart of recent changes. The inquiry team's work illustrates this well. Having identified a weakness in grade 5 English language arts, it traced the cause to a lack of understanding of inference from grade 2 onwards. This has led to remedial work in the older grades and a change to the curriculum for the younger students.

Differentiated instruction through small group work is the basis of the school's success, as this meets the needs of each student more specifically. English language learners progress particularly quickly in this format as an additional teacher specializes in reading instruction, which specifically meets their requirements. The curriculum for reading, writing and math is extensive, but the opportunity for students to apply their knowledge in science and social studies is limited. Students say they would like a greater variety of recreational activities to complement their academic studies. These are few, partly due to the school's restricted site.

What the principal asks of the students, he also demands of the teachers. They feel accountable for the success of their students, but there are many supports in place to ensure that help is at hand when needed. Consequently, like the students, staff are expected to succeed.

As a result, the school has made great strides in these areas since the previous Quality Review. There has also been some progress in raising the level of challenge to the higher-performing students and in the use of computers. The school has also made progress, as with empowering teachers to take responsibility for the success and discipline of their students, but this is just one instance and there is no single focus in other areas of the school's life, the education of the whole child, for example. Consequently, reforms do not always fit into a logical and well-planned structure.

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.

Teachers are extremely confident in their use of data. They constantly update their records from standardized tests, quizzes, classroom observation and one-to-one conferencing. Consequently, they know the level at which their students are performing in each area of the curriculum and plot their progress. Running records are crucial to this and teachers refer to them constantly in order to inform instruction of whole-class needs and those of different groups of students within the class.

The school not only uses data but also interrogates it for trends between different groups of students. When variation is apparent, action follows, as in the case of boys performing less well than girls do. As a result, the school purchased more books that boys favor and chose a more interactive approach for science, so raising boys' engagement and encouraging them to make greater progress.

The performance of English language learners' is carefully tracked to ensure they make similar progress to other students. An effective "push in" program identifies areas where they need specific help, while guaranteeing they do not miss any part of the curriculum.

In the spirit of self-improvement, the school systematically compares its performance year-to-year, detecting and acting on areas that may not match its own high standards. It is less sophisticated in comparing its performance with other, similar schools, except noting its performance compared to district data.

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

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

The goals students are set each month in reading, writing and math are firmly based on their prior performance. The students understand what they have to do to improve, as the teacher explains it to them individually. Progress reports every six weeks inform parents, so they can give assistance at home. Both teachers and parents can easily check whether students have made progress, as the goals are specific, such as "make fewer careless errors" and "read with understanding".

Students with special needs are monitored even more carefully with progress towards their plan carefully noted. The same is true of English language learners, who make remarkable progress, usually learning in a supportive environment alongside native English speakers. The inquiry team's focus on grade 5 students who were in danger of slipping below Level 3 the previous year, illustrates the school's concern for those who traditionally do not make sufficient progress in their final year at elementary school.

Parents speak warmly of the high expectations of the school in both academic work and behavior. However, they feel less confident about the school's goals and areas in which it hopes to develop, except to say that there has been a noticeable improvement in the performance of the students over the last three years. They feel well informed about their child's progress and hold teachers in high regard for the way they make themselves available to explain in detail what is required for their child to progress further. Additionally, details of the curriculum are sent home and as a result, more parents accept invitations to celebrations at the conclusion of a unit of work, so increasing the occasions when parents and teachers can exchange information to the benefit of their children's learning.

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.

A great strength of the school is that teachers are held accountable for their students' progress through detailed discussions with the principal. They are supported by professional development that has given them the tools to understand the power of data and the confidence to act on it. The result is that they take initiatives that target a specific need or add relevance to their own class, fairy tales as a topic in writing, for example. Small group work ensures differentiated instruction takes place. Reading and writing classes are in the lead in this area with groups constantly changing to reflect students' achievement, interest and preferred style of learning. There are some good practices in math where the program allows for different levels of achievement in each topic. Here the lower-achieving students are served well, but higher achieving students in the older grades are not always stretched.

There are many and varied procedures in place to follow up on absent students, but as students enjoy school, attendance and tardiness are not a major issue. Students and staff respect each other; as a result, there is a calm and constructive atmosphere in the school. Consequently, students behave well and feel safe as they claim always to have someone to turn to, if a need arises.

The faculty devotes much care to the choice of curriculum in science and social studies, ensuring these subjects are attractive to boys, for example. However, these subjects are given too little time in the school day to fully exploit their potential for increasing the students' knowledge and allowing them to apply their learning more widely.

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.

Teachers speak highly of the professional development opportunities they receive. Recent emphasis has been on the school's priority of differentiated instruction. The school has addressed this by a wide range of means, the most effective being pairing teachers with a colleague or coach who comments on actual lessons, with a view to

improvement. This fits in well with the frequent, regular, pertinent feedback administration teachers receive, which can vary from a quick note following a short “drop-in”, to a lengthy analysis after witnessing a full lesson. All of this focuses on the specific teacher’s goals, which are negotiated at the start of each year. Consequently, teachers feel more confident and there is a great degree of consistency of practice among faculty. Additionally, teachers of the same grade are able to jointly plan lessons on a regular basis and occasionally watch each other teach a similar topic to compare the effectiveness of different techniques, so learning from each other’s experience.

The school has clear rules for acceptable behavior that students respect in almost all cases because they understand they are in their best interest. This is encouraged by targets for behavior, which teachers assess and report to parents regularly. In addition, the whole class can gain a reward for good behavior, which focuses the students’ interest on group responsibility and working together as a team, so building skills for later in life.

The school has been careful with its selection of outside partners and rejected some as not providing sufficient rigor in their delivery of after school activities. Partly as a result, there are few sports and other recreational activities to engage students and give them a focus to complement their academic study.

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 principal’s vision for the school is one of constant improvement to become the school of first choice in the community. This vision is broken down into areas for student improvement, teacher outcomes and resources. However, there is no central image of what the school will be in the future. Plans are reactive, but nonetheless prove effective. For example, results of standardized assessments in math were not as high as was hoped, because the course was not easily adapted for differentiated instruction. The faculty took care in the choice of a replacement not only for it to meet this requirement, but also other objectives of the school, such as being adaptable for special education students. Implementation was planned well and has proved successful in raising performance, while teachers speak highly of the support they received, enabling them to feel confident in delivering this new course.

Both students and teachers have specific interim and final goals. The cabinet checks these rigorously and frequently, using quantitative data where possible and objective criteria where not. For example, a student’s annual target may be to progress to a reading book of level T, whereas their interim goal may be to concentrate on reading aloud in order to improve reading comprehension. Teacher and student discuss progress to this interim goal weekly and so they can easily adjust it when appropriate. Teachers’ targets are firmly linked to the progress of their students, which is formally noted as a result of the students’ standardized tests each six weeks. Interviews with the principal take place to analyze these results and targets for improvement are agreed. These complement teachers’ annual targets, which are expressed as an overall improvement in the performance of their class and in terms of instructional practice, such as differentiating tasks to match levels of performance.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Author's 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