



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

New Venture Academy

Middle School 219

3630 Third Avenue

Bronx

NY 10456

Principal: Dominic A. Cipollone

Dates of review: November 13 - 14, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Denis Pittman

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The New Venture Academy is a middle school with 458 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 49% Black, 50% Hispanic and 1% other. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 12% 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 87.2%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 92% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has a clear, well-communicated vision for the school and works passionately in the interests of students and the community.
- Parents are kept very well informed about their children's progress and appreciate the more open partnership that they share with the school.
- The identification of 'at risk' students, and the support strategies implemented for them, are effective and well organized.
- The small learning communities provide a focused, more individualized approach to support student academic and social well being.
- The productive arrangements with outside agencies and organizations effectively support curriculum initiatives and promote student development.
- Data collection is very effective and rigorous, enabling good tracking of individual students' achievement and progress.
- Formal and informal observations of classroom practice are systematically used to further improve instruction.
- Budgeting and staffing decisions have been very effectively and efficiently aligned with the school's improvement needs.
- New teachers are well supported so that they understand the school's procedures and expectations.
- The school has efficient procedures to promote a well-ordered learning environment.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop further all teachers' skills, knowledge and understanding of the collection and utilization of data to improve instruction.
- Continue to develop the curriculum to promote experimental inquiry and opportunities for independent research for students.
- Ensure that whole-school goals contain measurable interim criteria for success so that monitoring and review are more effective.
- Ensure that all teachers provide instruction that carefully matches the different learning needs of students in each class.
- Extend the professional development opportunities for teachers to share good practice.
- Develop communication links with parents to enable feedback from them about their children's interests and ways of learning.

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 principal leads this improving and well-organized school very effectively. His leadership has provided the key catalyst for sustaining development in recent years. The school has made a determined response to the challenge of improving its overall performance and is effective in most key areas of goal setting and planning, apart from the identification of interim objectives in relation to whole school goals. The effective collation of data helps monitor student progress systematically. The administration and faculty have a good understanding of their roles, and how they are going to make improvements. Parents are very appreciative of the safe learning community that has been created. The school is actively encouraging greater parental involvement and this is proving effective through higher attendance at organized workshops. The move to create small learning communities has been instrumental in creating cohesive team planning and effective curriculum monitoring. Staff communicate well with each other and have good opportunities to meet and develop ideas through comprehensive professional development. The opportunities to share good practice through interclass visitations are more limited. The quality of teaching is monitored regularly. This is leading to an overall improvement in quality, but instruction is not always carefully matched to the learning needs of all students. The school has the capacity to improve further and is well placed to do so.

Since the last review the school has improved its use of baseline data, developed the use of assessment binders and integrated technology into the curriculum. The school recognizes that it needs to continue developing the curriculum to include more experimental inquiry and opportunities for independent research. The inquiry team is in place and is at the stage of identifying a sample group of low-achieving students to address strategies for improving their performance in English language arts.

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 school has developed quality data-management procedures for collecting performance information and identifying the learning needs of students. A comprehensive analysis of student achievement is shared with all relevant members of the faculty. The benchmarking process is very effective in establishing initial learning stages for students. For example, the administration of a reading-levels assessment enables the classroom libraries to be used appropriately by students. The data analysis includes comparisons of

the progress made by different classes within a grade level which is a small learning community. The school has used the data analysis of literacy to identify improvement goals in relation to writing competence in all subject areas. Not all faculty members are equally conversant with how to use the information to plan and improve their instruction. The administration has recognized this and plans for all staff to receive training, particularly in relation to the new city wide assessment systems that are being set in place.

Class teachers keep a close check on the progress made by the individual students in their class through compilation of a standard data binder. 'Data conferencing' with students from a 'gains' report shows how close a student is to obtaining the next performance level. Staff have a good understanding of the needs and capabilities of special education students and English language learners, whose performance improves accordingly. The specialists' guidance in relation to diagnostic assessment is of particular benefit in helping the students make significant progress.

The identification of the relative progress of specific ethnic groups is not strongly pursued because of the school's focus on the needs of the individual student. The evidence from past performance data indicates the relative underachievement of boys against the overall performance of girls. Currently the inquiry team has analyzed its benchmarking data to focus upon improving the performance of low achieving grade 6 students in English language arts. The principal systematically checks the quantitative data of similar schools so as to benchmark his own school's relative performance. Overall the school makes very effective use of its data in order to identify how improve achievement even further.

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 school makes good use of the information it has collected in order to set learning steps for individual students, classes, and groups of students. Overarching goals, such as the development of a model classroom, systematic evaluation of student work and the creation of a standardized assessment binder, are effectively determined within the context of the small learning communities. The provision of common planning time enables goals to be set appropriately in terms of interim measurable outcomes for students.

Staff are skilful and committed to promoting the performance of those students who are experiencing the greatest difficulty in making progress. Early-morning and after-school intervention programs are specifically geared to this purpose. A personal intervention plan is compiled for at risk students, which identifies all services being received by the student. Specialist staff, such as a social worker and psychologist, work closely with teachers to carefully identify the nature of the problems that the students are having. These detailed discussions are regular and reflect the concern of the school in meeting the needs of all students.

Parents are pleased with the way in which the school is encouraging them to be partners in the education of their children. The parent coordinator actively seeks to improve this partnership through a range of workshop activities. For example, the Computers for Youth program ran a workshop for parents and students which culminated in families receiving a free desktop computer for use at home. These initiatives have been well received. Parents are kept well informed about their child's progress and what needs to be done to improve performance. They feel that the school provides their children with

interesting work and promotes high expectations in order to improve the standard of academic work. Parents are aware of the high expectations for students to behave well in the classroom and in other areas of the school. Students are also aware of the high expectations that are placed upon them. The school recognizes the need to develop the links with parents to enable them to provide information about their child's interests and ways of 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 proficient.

The core curriculum is expertly mapped so as to provide detailed information about the progress and achievement of students. Programs are aligned with the mandated curriculum standards and there is more flexibility in the delivery of the literacy program. The emphasis on writing across the curriculum is appropriately endorsed through the planning meetings of the small learning communities. Technology is being effectively integrated into the social studies program and in consequence is enhancing the competences of students. Opportunities for scientific experimentation and enquiry are limited and the school recognizes this. A variety of after-school clubs in art and music extends the creative learning experiences of students. In general, teachers respond well to their accountability of making lessons interesting. The "Teaching Matters" program provides support in utilizing technology to make lessons stimulating for students. However, some staff are not sufficiently adept at aligning their instruction so that it matches up with the different needs of the students in the class.

The administration continually searches for creative and efficient ways of utilizing the school's budget and resources. The decision to move to an organization based on small learning communities required additional resources and staffing. Extra staff with expertise, such as in social studies, were hired to complement the staffing in these respective communities. The development of literacy across the curriculum has been well supported by professional development program teachers.

There is a high level of mutual trust and respect shown in the interactions around the school. The relationships between students and adults are positive and supportive. Students get on well with each other. There has been a reduction in the number of incidents of unacceptable behavior, and the community is confident that this is "a safe school". Students understand the importance of regular attendance. The systems for monitoring this are well organized and they are complemented by motivational rewards for students who attend regularly.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

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

The quality of lessons is monitored regularly by senior leaders. There is a common format for these observations to ensure consistency of practice. The focus for these reviews, such as the quality of the classroom environment, is effectively identified at the administrative planning meetings. The identification of areas for improvement presents a focus for the implementation of professional development. The administration provides a

wide range of professional support to staff in order to make them even better at their jobs. Staff working within the small learning communities, have regular opportunities to share ideas through common planning time, and by occasionally seeing each other teach, but this is limited. Teachers go out of their way to provide mutual support for each other, particularly for the new staff where an effective mentoring program is in place.

The guidance programs which operate in the school are very effectively geared to meet the specific social and emotional needs of students, who are drawn from a turbulent community. Programs such as "Turnaround for children" provide a lifeline for students who need special forms of support. The efficient use of resources and staff is a strong feature of the guidance and support arrangements. The principal runs an efficiently-organized school which has an orderly, calm and productive feel to it. The students, staff and parents are increasingly proud of their school. The school provides students with numerous opportunities to develop interests, for example, through partnership arrangements such as the "Beacon" program which provides a variety of after-school 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.

Staff work hard, through regular data conferencing with students, to make sure that each student knows exactly how well they have done and what they need to do next in order to improve. There are effective systems to enable the administration to measure the progress of the different groups, classes and small learning communities. However, interim objectives in relation to whole-school goals are not as clearly defined and, as such, are not easily measurable. The school has general statements for these objectives, but has not adequately specified monitoring accountabilities or timeframes for this to be done. As a consequence, it is more difficult than it should be to evaluate the monitoring of ongoing initiatives.

The administration and faculty have worked systematically to ensure that there is careful evaluation of each individual student's progress, through regular moderation of work and the creation of assessment binders. A significant part of this process is the resetting of learning goals for individual students. The implementation of these moderating processes has been successful in promoting greater consistency in achievement, for example, in the quality of writing. The school is proactive in its plans, through professional development, to support staff in their understanding of changes in periodic assessment procedures. These will enable staff to predict final and interim outcomes for students, and to monitor how well they have achieved those outcomes.

The principal has set out a clear program for improvement and development. Through his example and open discussion, he has made sure that everyone, including staff, parents and students, are fully aware of the short- and long-term goals for the school. He has created a very effective context for these developments to be realized.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: New Venture 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 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		