



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Science School for Exploration and Discovery

**Middle School 224
345 Brook Avenue
Bronx
NY 10454**

Principal: Charles Johnson

Dates of review: May 29 - 30, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Helen Donnellan

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Science School for Exploration and Discovery is a middle school with 350 students from grades 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 31% Black, 68% Hispanic, and 1% of students from other ethnic backgrounds. The student body includes 22% English language learners and 23% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 85.5%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 93% eligibility.

The school shares a building with another middle school. The principal was appointed in November 2006.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal drives the agenda for improvement and sets out necessary changes and goals in well-structured plans.
- The principal uses data to evaluate the impact of instruction and interventions and make appropriate changes to enhance student learning.
- Students follow the clear systems and expectations for respectful behavior so the school is safe and orderly.
- Student attendance has increased as a result of rigorous pursuit of absence and tardiness.
- School leaders and teachers have accurate knowledge of student progress and performance through systematic use of formal and informal data.
- Data is used extensively to compare progress and performance between classes and grades and with other similar schools.
- Teachers and administrators investigate stronger and weaker learning outcomes and use this to provide instruction that raises achievement.
- Teachers are held accountable for providing effective instruction that motivates students and enables them to make progress.
- Professional development focuses on the school priorities for improvement and teacher needs and has led to significant improvement in instruction.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all teachers use data to set realistic and challenging goals, especially for higher-achieving students.
- Build on existing work to improve differentiated instruction in all classes and subjects.
- Support teachers in gaining further knowledge and skills in the use of data to shape differentiated instruction.
- Extend the goal-setting process by formalizing the existing system for teachers to set personal goals that are measurable and time limited.
- Develop ways of gathering the views of parents and students about how to encourage students to participate further in 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 is unswerving in his drive to improve instruction, student learning, and behavior. The orderly way the school now runs and improved student learning outcomes confirm the successes achieved during his tenure. He has addressed each issue raised in the last Quality Review with rigor. The starting point for improvement is the well-structured planning for sustainable long-term improvement. Each area in the plan shows short, medium and long-term goals, which are broken down into actions and desired goals for each grade. The goals are displayed in high profile locations throughout the school, so that staff and students have frequent reminders about the school and grade priorities.

Data is now gathered with rigor and consistency through standardized assessments and quarterly reading tests, so that tracking of student progress is more systematic and accurate. The richness of the data is used well to identify groups of students and compare their progress throughout the year. Some teachers make good use of data to plan differentiated instruction, but this is not yet fully established across all classes. Teachers are held accountable for providing interesting lessons to help students achieve. The principal is astute in his monitoring of assessment data and uses this to determine subject and grade groups in order to maximize learning. Student attendance has increased significantly since the principal instigated effective systems to deal with absence and lateness.

Student performance and behavior have improved because of stronger instruction and consistent systems to make them accountable for their own actions. Students speak of the positive impact of the changes they have seen at the school and particularly the respectful relationships that exist between staff and students. Students are clear about their goals and what they need to do in order to achieve those goals, but there is insufficient challenge for higher-achieving students. Teacher goals are not so clearly defined and monitoring of their progress against their goals is less rigorous. The parent coordinator was recently hired and is working hard to encourage parents to become more involved in the life of the school and their children's education and overcome a history of limited interaction between parents and the school. The students are articulate and reflective about the school and instruction but currently do not have a forum to express their views and influence the school formally.

The inquiry team is working with a group of fifteen special education students to explore effective ways for them to learn number operations. The results of this study are pivotal to instructional approaches for 2008-2009.

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 clear and well-structured systems to track the progress and performance of students in all grades. The principal has introduced rigor into data gathering and analysis, which teachers accept as a foundation of the school's work. They use quarterly diagnostic assessments routinely to track the progress of all students and groups. Recent English language arts scores in State tests confirm the reliability of the school's diagnostic and predictive test results in tracking student progress.

Most teachers make good use of these tracking systems and are confident to analyze and use data to refine and extend those systems to make them more meaningful for their students. The special education teacher has done this with printouts of Acuity assessments to highlight specific areas where students need further reinforcement. Not all staff are sufficiently confident to use data innovatively and plan differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students.

The principal leads the way in making comparisons between different groups of students and with other schools to identify areas of strength, which the school can learn from. As well as monitoring the progress and performance of different ethnic and gender groups, the school takes care to track the learning of other key groups. One such group is students who are held over in a grade and monitoring through the year ensures that they make sustained progress and overcome earlier under-achievement.

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 systems for gathering and analyzing data are systematic and all teachers are well informed about the progress and performance of every student they teach. Teachers and administrators use data to determine student goals at student and whole-school level, which ensures a unified approach to raising learning outcomes. They use data methodically to identify goals and actions for grades and subjects that will contribute to the achievement of the school target identified in the 2006-2007 progress report.

The administrators take great care to plan class groups and instruction content to allow hold-over students to overcome earlier delays in their learning. These are highly effective, as all hold-over students in this year's cohort have moved from Level 1, with all 22 students making at least one year's progress and some making more than two years. The school still faces the challenge of raising expectations in order to move Level 3 students to Level 4. Currently the goals for Level 3 students lack sufficient challenge, which results in some under-achievement.

The recently appointed parent coordinator works hard to increase the quality and quantity of information that is sent to parents and in a short time her actions have led to greater parent involvement. Currently this is limited to sending information to parents, rather than seeking it from them and establishing effective partnerships. There is no opportunity for students to influence school life and develop skills of citizenship, as there is no student government or similar forum for them to express their views.

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 review of the curriculum has led to secure alignment of content and assessment. As a result, teachers can now identify the strands, questions and a skill where students do well and those where further instruction is needed. Some teachers make good use of data to improve their instruction, particularly item skill analyses. This is illustrated by the improved performance in the 2008 English language arts assessments. All staff are clear about the need to improve instruction and be consistent in the way they apply the school codes for positive management of student behavior. This clarity is a crucial factor that underpins the improvements achieved since 2006.

The school no longer resembles the chaotic environment it was two years ago. The consistent use of positive behavior management and improving the quality of instruction to increase students' motivation to learn has enabled the administration and staff to focus on learning rather than crisis management. Consequently, the school is now orderly and the atmosphere is conducive to learning. Attendance has risen due to the great rigor in pursuing absence and the motivation of students to participate in the stimulating instruction now provided in classes.

The principal analyzes data at class and student level to identify students with similar learning needs and then group them into classes. Therefore, students receive instruction according to their learning needs and not their grade level, which is helping them to improve their performance. This reinforces the need for more effective differentiated instruction within classes and grades to limit such interventions and ensure more rapid progress, particularly for higher achieving students.

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 action plan makes clear how professional development is targeted at achieving the school priorities to raise learning outcomes and deal with poor behavior. The focus of classroom observations is improving instruction in order to make the necessary improvements in learning. Not all the written feedback following observations focuses on what students learn as a result of instruction and some feedback lacks sufficient precision. This means that teachers are unclear about what they do well and exactly what they need to change in order to improve. New and established teachers

value the opportunities they have to share expertise with each other and improve in a “supportive, not competitive way”.

The students have a clear understanding of how they are expected to behave and apply themselves to learning which means that the school runs smoothly. The positive behavior system is successful in motivating students to learn and take responsibility for their behavior. They receive reward tokens that they accumulate and exchange for school supplies or uniform. The expectations for behavior and purposeful displays of student work linked to the curriculum create an environment that is positive and conducive to learning.

The school is making progress in establishing effective partnerships to support academic and personal growth and enhance school-provided services. There is now an effective working partnership between the two schools on the site and the school makes good use of this to provide jointly run events and workshops.

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 leads the faculty in planning in great depth to achieve the school goals. This results in plans that take into account the “big picture” goals for the school and the detailed actions needed to achieve that picture, maintain its stability and sustain academic growth. The monitoring is just as clear and robust, so that modifications are made through the year, that take into account changes in student needs. The structure for setting goals is cohesive and ensures that student goals link securely to whole-school goals and plans. Currently the teachers have no formal goals, but meet with the principal each year to identify their strengths and areas to develop. These areas are not written with sufficient sharpness to be easily monitored through the year, so it is not clear how progress against these can be measured.

Teachers and administrators use interim benchmarks consistently and successfully to track progress and make necessary changes without undue delay thereby minimizing further delays to student learning. The principal monitors learning and instruction diligently and is alert to early indicators of slowing down in student progress or teacher under-performance. He changes student groupings based on evidence and is sensitive to student needs for either reinforcement or challenge. This approach ensures that progress is maintained and is helping to overcome earlier under-achievement.

The school plans are detailed and show that the school leaders are alert and responsive to the immediate and longer-term issues for the school. These rightly focus on improving instruction and raising learning outcomes and take into account staff and accommodation changes. Current planning includes factors such as the changes needed to accommodate a high school into the building and strategies for succession plans to ensure a smooth transition when known staff moves take place.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Science School for Exploration and Discovery	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