



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Theater Arts Production Company

**Middle - High School 225
2225 Webster Avenue
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Lynn Passarella

Dates of review: March 6 - 7, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Tony Boys

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well
What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review
Overall evaluation
How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Theater Arts Production Company (TAPCo) is a middle-high school with 458 students from grade 6 through grade 11. The school population comprises 24% Black, 69% Hispanic, 4% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 36% of the students enrolled and girls account for 64%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 - 2007 was 92.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 65% eligibility.

As its name suggests, TAPCo has a strong focus on theatre arts alongside the mandatory curriculum. It is a very popular school, attracting far more applications than the number of places it has to offer. The school was founded in 1999 as a middle school and is now developing as a middle-high school, which will see its first grade 12 cohort graduate in 2009. The school is designated an Empowerment School by the New York City Department of Education, giving it increased flexibility in its curriculum, professional development and use of resources. It shares its building and some facilities with another school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and administration lead the school very effectively and communicate a clear vision for its development to the whole community.
- The innovative curriculum is very effective in engaging students and enhancing their experience, both within and beyond the school day.
- Teachers use assessment extremely well to understand all students' progress and to identify individual learning needs.
- The school conveys very high expectations to teachers, students and parents, resulting in a high level of support and commitment to its aims.
- The school values and encourages parental involvement and provides very good information to help parents support their children's education.
- Instruction is interesting, relevant and challenging due to the commitment of teachers and the clear lines of accountability set by administration.
- There is an extremely high level of trust and respect between students and staff, reflecting the school's caring ethos and determination to change lives.
- The school supports staff, students and parents very effectively, within a safe, secure and very positive learning environment.
- Procedures to ensure smooth running are very effective, resulting in very good behavior and harmonious relationships.
- Attendance is high because students enjoy school and have high aspirations to succeed.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the use of student-friendly rubrics that enable all students to understand clearly how they can improve their work.
- Refine strategies for differentiation within heterogeneous classes.
- Review and evaluate strategies for the development of the high school, in the light of experience, in order to build further on its success.
- Continue to improve the school's facilities and resources, as budgetary constraints allow.

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.

The school's mission of changing lives and aspirations through education drives all its activities. The principal and administration lead the school extremely well in communicating this vision to the whole community. As a result, students, parents and staff are strongly committed to the school's aims, maintaining a clear focus on improving learning and achievement. This has helped students to make very good progress as the school has developed as a middle-high school. This process will culminate in 2009 with the school's first graduating grade 12 cohort, the vast majority aspiring to college entry. The school has plans to review fully and evaluate the development of the high school but this has not yet taken place.

The school's culture of care and support for students and their families underpins its determination to make sure that students have the academic and interpersonal skills to succeed as they move on from school. It does this very well through an innovative and engaging curriculum that has a strong focus on theater arts alongside the mandatory subjects. As a result, the curriculum provides a very wide range of opportunities for students to participate in academic and recreational activities, both within and beyond the school day. Instruction is interesting, relevant and challenging due to the commitment of teachers and the clear lines of accountability set by administration. The school's very high expectations and extremely positive atmosphere of trust and respect between students and staff also support learning very well. The very effective curriculum and organizational systems ensure that students enjoy school, behave very well and have high attendance. The school values and encourages parental involvement and supports parents well. A comprehensive and very effective assessment system supports the curriculum, giving teachers a detailed knowledge of students' progress and learning needs so that instruction is targeted on improving the skills they are lacking. This has a very positive effect on students' progress and achievement, especially in their skills development classes. Teachers have developed clear rubrics that ensure clarity and consistency in assessment. The process of writing these rubrics in student-friendly language has begun but is not yet complete, so some students are not always clear about specific ways of improving their work. The range of achievement in heterogeneous classes is much wider than in skills groups. Teachers differentiate work to account for this but the range of strategies is not wide enough in some classes. The school's budgetary and strategic planning focuses very well on achievement and learning although it is constrained to some extent by the school facilities and lack of space in the building. The school has tackled all the issues raised in the previous Quality Review through increased professional development, curriculum planning and the establishment of inquiry teams that focus effectively on student progress.

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.

Assessment and monitoring of student progress is extremely effective. Teachers gather a very wide range of data using their own classroom-based assessments as well as standardized tests linked to analysis software. In addition, all students build up portfolios of work that are assessed periodically, adding an extra dimension to teachers’ understanding of their progress. The school considers the full range of assessments to allocate students to skills groups based on their learning needs. Students work in these groups on two days a week to develop their weakest skill area. This allows work to be highly differentiated to match each group’s needs and gives teachers an excellent understanding of students’ progress. Special education students and English language learners undergo these assessments in addition to others specific to their needs. This gives teachers a very clear picture of their needs and progress. Teachers also consider students’ emotional and social needs when analyzing their progress, mindful of the influence these exert on learning. Overall, these comprehensive systems for assessing the progress of all students have a very positive impact on their learning.

The school uses data very effectively to analyze its own performance in promoting student progress. Administration compares the performance of different classes, subjects, ethnic groups and gender groups, using spreadsheets, graphs and charts to inform its understanding of the school’s effectiveness. It also compares the school’s performance to similar schools across a range of measures to understand how it stands in relation to its peers. These systems give the school an excellent understanding of its effectiveness to inform development planning.

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 uses data very effectively to plan and set goals for improvement. Teachers use the information from its wide range of assessments to identify the skill areas that students need to work on and to plan work that develops these skills. This allows the school to set specific short and medium-term goals for improvement, reflecting students’ individual needs. Students contribute to the goal-setting process through periodic self-assessment. This close focus on developing skills and setting goals encourages students to believe that they can improve and succeed. One student’s belief that “This school turned it around for me” is shared by many others and illustrates the impact on learning that results from the effective use of assessment data.

The school conveys exceptionally high expectations in terms of work and conduct to students, parents and teachers. As a result, students have high aspirations, the vast majority aiming at college entry. In pursuit of this aim, many are enrolled in the “College Now” program at Lehman College. The school’s philosophy of “never giving up on a

student” underlies its relationships with parents. The school values and strongly encourages parental involvement. Parents understand that the school wants the best for their children and value the support the school gives them. This support includes access to the school’s web-site, where they can find student records, information about the curriculum and help and advice on a wide range of issues. Parents speak very highly of the school’s efforts to keep them informed and to involve them in all aspects of their children’s 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.

The school has used the flexibility resulting from its empowerment designation to design an innovative and engaging curriculum that focuses strongly on theater arts alongside traditional subjects. Theater arts studies support other aspects of the curriculum to give students a broad and relevant education. For example, in set design classes students use math skills in the context of designing theatre sets, reinforcing their understanding of the applications of math. Students also study other arts subjects including music, video and acting. They collaborate extremely well in these classes, as in a music class where a whole class played several musical compositions in which each had individual guitar parts. These classes also support the school’s aim of meeting the students’ personal and social needs. For example, acting classes often allow students to act out situations that have relevance in their personal lives. Alongside these innovative classes, the school teaches traditional subjects with challenge and rigor. The school holds teachers responsible for ensuring that students make good progress. In response, they plan interesting and stimulating lessons that fully engage students. They use assessment data to plan instruction that considers students’ learning needs. This is particularly effective in skills groups, where work is very well matched to students’ needs. In heterogeneous groups, teachers differentiate work to account for broad differences in achievement but the range of strategies used is not always wide enough. All subjects use detailed rubrics that are very useful in ensuring consistency in assessment. Teachers are producing student-friendly versions of these but they are not yet available in all subjects. As a result, students do not always fully understand the specific actions needed to improve their work. An extremely positive atmosphere of trust and respect between students and staff supports instruction. This, together with the high-quality curriculum, ensures that students enjoy school, behave very well and have high attendance. The school’s budgetary and strategic planning focuses very well on achievement and learning although it is constrained to some extent by the school facilities and lack of space in the building.

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 school supports teachers and students extremely well. Teachers have very good access to training activities and receive very helpful feedback following classroom observations, enabling them to constantly improve instruction. The school provides mentors for new and inexperienced teachers and they receive excellent support from

colleagues. Systems for supporting students are extremely effective. As a result of a very successful pilot project, every student now attends a team-building camp to strengthen confidence in their ability to succeed and to work with teachers and others to reach their goals. In addition, the school places all students in small advisory groups with a teacher who monitors and discusses their progress. Teachers have frequent sessions where they share important information about student progress. Skills groups also provide very effective academic support. The school has very clear and effective systems for allocating intervention services where necessary. Students speak highly of the support they receive, using such phrases as “nothing is too much trouble for the teachers in this school”. They readily identify the teachers as the school’s greatest strength. The quality of support for students reflects the school’s educational goals and has a very strong impact on their learning and progress. Very clear and effective systems to ensure smooth running enhance the learning environment and result in very positive behavior and attitudes. The school has strong links with outside agencies including the Children’s Aid Society and Lehman College. These reinforce and enhance support for students’ academic and personal growth.

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 and administration lead the school extremely well, communicating a very clear vision for future development to the whole community. Parents, students and staff understand the school’s aims very well and work collaboratively together to achieve the common purpose of improving learning. Parents and students readily attest to the school’s role in making a difference and encouraging ambition. They see the school as “home away from home” where “there is always someone to turn to”. The school’s mission of changing lives and aspirations through education drives all its activities. The principal has set a challenging long-term goal of achieving a 90% acceptance rate to college. The school is making good progress towards achieving this goal and has set realistic interim goals as milestones by which to measure the effectiveness of improvement strategies. Teachers use assessment data effectively when evaluating the impact of instruction and modifying teaching strategies. Students have improvement goals, which also include interim goals, as for example in skills groups, where students aim at becoming proficient within a specified time-scale. The school encourages students to set their own short-term goals through the use of “at a glance” summary sheets that all students complete each marking period. Teachers’ improvement and professional development plans make use of interim goals to keep development strategies on track. The school’s effective use of interim goals helps it to review and revise its improvement plans to drive forward the next stage of development. The principal and administration have identified the need to review and evaluate the development of the high school but this has not yet taken place.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Theatre Arts Production Company	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