



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy

Elementary School 236

**499 East 176th Street
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Beverly Ellis

Dates of review: December 6 - 7, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Jo Cheadle

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy is an elementary school with 398 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 2. The school population comprises 33% Black, 64% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 28% special education students. Boys account for 59% of the students enrolled and girls account for 41%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 90.3%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 94% eligibility.

The school is split over two sites with kindergarten and grade 1 classes represented on both sites. The principal is located at the Elementary School 236 building and the assistant principal at PS173. Despite the difficulties a split site might cause for the school, leaders and faculty are committed to ensuring that they work as one staff with consistent approaches, common goals and a shared vision for the future of the school. Inevitably, this results in additional work and time to make sure that all staff are well informed, attend all professional development opportunities and communicate with each other effectively. Some parents find the journey between the two schools difficult.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The vision for the future of the school is very clear, communicated effectively and shared by all.
- There are very high expectations of staff and equally high aspirations for students' futures.
- The school is very self-reflective, setting challenging goals for development and monitoring progress toward them honestly and effectively.
- Leaders make regular and rigorous use of relevant data to monitor how well the school is doing and plan effectively for future developments.
- The school places great value on nurturing students' personal and social development alongside academic achievement.
- There are very good opportunities for continued professional development that support individual members of staff and encourage progress toward school goals.
- There is a strong commitment to making learning engaging and relevant for students.
- The school creates effective partnerships with a range of support groups that encourage good development and improvement.
- Excellent relationships between faculty members support the school's continuous development.
- The school is well organized and very effectively managed, enabling students to learn in a calm and purposeful environment.

What the school needs to improve

- Make extended use of information regarding students' social, personal context and prior learning to inform teaching and learning.
- Develop further the differentiation of instruction to meet students' needs.
- Ensure that there are consistent procedures for communicating learning goals to parents.
- Enhance data analysis to include all relevant sub-groups.

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.

From the moment that you enter either of the Langston Hughes school buildings, it is very apparent that this is a school where staff care greatly for their students. Hallways and classrooms are bright and stimulating and well-organized displays celebrate a wealth of student work. The buildings are extremely clean, well presented and there are very good resources, carefully chosen to stimulate student engagement and good learning. This attention to detail and commitment to providing well for students emulates primarily from the principal. Her care and respect for students and staff is fully recognized, appreciated and reciprocated. Students themselves say, "Our school is always neat and tidy. At the end of the day when we go home, we leave all our mess. In the morning when we come back, everything is made clean and tidy again. This helps us to learn really well." This small example is one indicator of the principal's clearly communicated vision for her students; that they deserve the best and that it is the responsibility of the school to provide well for them. School goals are extremely relevant and displayed around the building. Staff are fully aware of their role in achieving goals and work diligently and accountably to ensure success.

Leaders and faculty are knowledgeable about where the school needs to improve. They have made good progress on most areas for development noted during the last Quality Review just nine months ago. Comparisons with other schools have significantly improved and there are some extremely useful practices in place to compare student outcomes. Communication with parents is also more effective, although some parents would appreciate a more consistent way of informing them of their children's individual goals. While staff generally know their students very well, best use is not made of the vital information they have about students' social and personal contexts and starting points for learning to match their needs as soon as they start school. Likewise, analysis of data is not always as detailed as necessary to plan consistently for effectively differentiated instruction. While the school has an extensive collection of useful data, as yet, some vital subgroups are not analyzed carefully enough to ensure that leaders have a true picture of how some of these students are making progress.

The school's inquiry team has made a good start to its work. The group has focused on spoken language skills and has identified a group of students who are in need of improvement in this area. In order to measure the success of intervention, the team is carefully developing an assessment rubric for leveling speaking skills.

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 proficient.

The school has come a long way in comparing its work with other similar establishments and this aspect of data analysis is now well developed. Leaders have established good partnerships with similar local schools to evaluate classroom practice and make improvements that influence student progress positively. The school also compares its outcomes with another school working with consultants from Australian and United States Services in Education. Both schools are using Rigby assessment materials and comparing student outcome data to evaluate the success of intervention strategies. Leaders will use findings to influence future teaching methods and organization. The school makes full analysis and use of data pertaining to some subgroups. This includes close attention to the youngest learners in each grade group, special education students and English language learners. Early signs indicate that the progress made by these students is improving. However, other very important subgroups, such as Spanish speaking girls, do not receive the same close analysis. Leaders recognize such analysis would enable further comparisons with similar subgroups in other schools, but also direct amendments and improvements to instruction to meet the specific needs of all students.

The school has a wealth of data regarding its students and knows individuals and their families very well. Much of this is available because students come to the school from the successful Head Start program that shares the Elementary School 236 building. However, not enough use is made of the initial information that leaders and teachers have about students' social, personal and prior life experiences to plan for very early learning experiences. Leaders recognize that this information is vitally important to plan effective instruction from the moment that students enter the school. In many cases, gaps in students' learning and life experiences need to be quickly reconciled to ensure that they make good progress from day one. As a pre-kindergarten to grade 2 school, leaders understand that all relevant information needs to be quickly collected, analyzed and made effective use of to have maximum impact on students' learning.

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.

Staff work in close collaboration to understand the needs of students and set meaningful goals for them. Because teachers know individual students very well, goal setting is specific and detailed. Good use is made of a growing range of formal assessment materials to monitor progress and indicate gaps in learning. Teachers work together to moderate writing to ensure that there is a clear understanding of expected standards. Such collaboration and understanding is enabling effective teacher assessment to measure progress. From assessment information, teachers revise goals on an ongoing basis to ensure that they remain relevant and progressive. In simple terms, students talk about the goals set for them and know what they need to do to improve their work. They particularly recognize progress in reading, saying, "I know if I get better at reading because I practice the things my teacher tells me to and then I go up a level." Parents are generally

aware of the “next steps” in their children’s learning, but report some inconsistency in how the school communicates goals to them. The school wants to improve on this aspect by involving parents more in the goal setting process. Since the last Quality Review, leaders have worked on building strong partnerships with parents. Parents are fully encouraged to share information about their children to ensure that the school can do the best job possible for them. Parents recognize this and feel that “the principal is very close to us and accommodating of our needs”. One father stated that he was “excited by the fact that teachers really care about my daughter”. This care and desire to provide well for students strongly influences staff collaboration and planning for learning.

The school provides good support for those students in greatest need of improvement. An example of this is the close attention to individuals who make limited progress at the start of an academic year and signify that “promotion” may be in doubt. If data indicates that this is a pattern repeated from previous grade groups, leaders contact parents even as early as November, and make special accommodations to avoid “hold over” situations. These students have clear action plans for intervention strategies and support from specialized personnel. Teachers address their needs, monitor success carefully and they make good progress.

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 makes wise curriculum choices that instill young students with a zest for learning and happy thoughts about school. There has been a huge revamp of the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten curriculum to meet the needs of young learners more effectively. The focus has been on what is developmentally appropriate for these age groups. Classrooms now have learning areas that encourage the development of early skills and knowledge through directed exploration. Students show good levels of engagement, curiosity and progress in classes where these experiences are best organized and delivered. In addition, staff have collaborated very effectively to ensure that units of study across the grades are continuous and progressive. They have adapted basic core programs, such as Every Day Math and Teachers College literacy work, to create relevant and interesting instruction. Students say that they “get to have fun, learning at school”. Teachers are currently working on the adaptation of social studies units to ensure they fully meet the students’ needs. In the best practice, these units are adapted further to meet the specific needs of groups or individuals within the class. Consistency in differentiation and the use of data to ensure a good match of work to needs is an area for further improvement. Nonetheless, expectations at the school are very high. The principal demands high levels of respect and care for students. She is a good role model for these attitudes, as is her assistant principal. In turn, students show great affection for both leaders. All staff are held in the same high regard and an atmosphere of mutual professional respect is very evident. Teachers are very clear that leaders will hold them to account if their work does not support good student progress. They are very accepting of this, determined to improve their practice at all times in order to meet the high expectations. They too are very appreciative of the way that the principal runs the school and cares for the students. This positive atmosphere and learning climate encourages good attendance. The principal, however, would like attendance rates to be better still. She works with individual parents to improve figures overall.

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.

This is a very well organized and smooth running school where all individuals understand their roles well. The administrative support team is particularly effective, providing a friendly, efficient and caring "first-face" for parents and visitors. Moreover, the principal knows her staff very well. While there have been few formal observations of teaching and learning of late, it is evident that the principal is never far away from the classroom. This enables her to make secure judgments for professional development that match teachers' individual needs. She is acutely aware of which teachers need most support, but also recognizes and celebrates the real potential in each of her staff. She is able to match very well, therefore, all professional development to individual needs to meet the school's overall vision for success and long-term development goals. Teachers feel supported by the opportunities leaders offer them. Even when messages are tough, they understand that leaders will provide the training and development that enhance their skills and knowledge and make them better teachers. The school coaches play an important role in adapting and implementing training opportunities. Colleagues are also very open to learning from each other. Teachers from both schools meet in regular common prep-time, sharing ideas and learning from each other. They are also adept at attending outside conferences and "turn keying" effectively for colleagues. Current staff learning is involved with the development of emotionally responsive classrooms, which is central to a school improvement goal. Overall, professional development opportunities are very good and positively encourage the school's continual improvement. Good links with a range of partners, such as Teachers College, Australian and United States Services in Education and Bank Street College enhance the overall program.

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 school's vision for its future is extremely clear and leaders and staff communicate it effectively. Parents share the vision for the development of their children's learning potential and have high aspirations for their futures. Strategic planning effectively supports the realization of this vision and there are good long-term objectives for the school's development. Plans are recorded in real working documents. The analysis of ongoing assessments and monitoring of progress enables leaders to revise and adapt plans to meet the overall goals. Teachers are beginning to make more extended and confident use of assessment materials and their input to the interim and immediate revision of action plans is increasingly more effective. The inquiry team shows good evidence of this. They work collaboratively to measure the success of their work so far and use their findings to amend original plans and to set new project time lines and success criteria. The school is self-reflective and makes positive use of regular and rigorous evaluations of its work. Leaders and staff are not complacent when success is obvious and the desire to improve continually is the driving force behind the very serious approach to whole school development.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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 . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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 . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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	