



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The DreamYard Preparatory School

**High School 329
240 East 172 Street
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Rod Bowen

Dates of review: May 27 – 28, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Barry King

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The DreamYard Preparatory School is a high school with 202 students in grades 9 and 10. The school population comprises 35% Black, 62% Hispanic and 1% White students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and has no officially designated 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 79.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 77% eligibility.

The school was founded in September 2006 with grade 9 only and it is adding a grade each year until it has grades 9 through 12 in 2009. It is an outgrowth of the not-for-profit DreamYard Project, which promotes arts as a way of supporting student education. DreamYard Preparatory School shares a building with five other schools. The principal is the sole member of the administration.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is implementing a clear vision of the school's future that is shared and understood by stakeholders.
- The school has well-judged strategic priorities for the next steps in its development, and aligns resources well to deliver them.
- Teachers are well supported by a program of professional development that is aligned to their individual needs and the school's overriding priorities, such as gathering and using data
- Common planning time and intervisitations between classrooms are developing within the staff a strong sense of teamwork.
- External partnerships, particularly the one with the DreamYard Project, strongly support the school's growth in the arts.
- Students have a broad curriculum that includes a good range of arts electives and after-school activities.
- The school has improved its gathering and collation of data so that it now has a secure overview of student progress.
- Staff use data to identify in good time any students falling behind, and realign instruction for them as necessary.

What the school needs to improve

- Implement more consistently the procedures relating to the school's expectations of students and the planning of lessons.
- Use data to extend the differentiation of work so that it is more closely matched to student needs.
- Agree measurable longer-term goals with each student, and monitor the rate of progress toward them.
- Involve more parents in the work and life of the school, and in support of the education of their children.
- Ensure consistent expectations about student behavior and concern for their learning environment.
- As the school expands, ensure that suitable teaching spaces are available for all classes.

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 has guided the improvement and expansion of the school effectively over the past year. He has communicated his vision of the school's development well to all stakeholders. This vision, of motivating students through exposure to the arts to build their capacity to learn, is reflected well in the wide range of arts opportunities in the weekly schedule and in after-school activities. The DreamYard Project provides strong support to the school in delivering these opportunities.

The school responded well to all the issues raised in the previous Quality Review. It has created a clear three-year strategic plan, which is in tune with its broad mission. The plan sets out very clearly the intended stages in the school's development and contains well-judged strategic decisions about its future growth. The school intends to build on its much improved data gathering next year by using the data to extend differentiation of instruction, which is currently infrequent. The work of the inquiry team has helpfully focused on slower learners in grades 9 and 10, and is placed to make a helpful contribution to this priority. Departments have measurable goals to aim at, but these are not set for individual students and so the school does not have secure measures against which to assess their progress.

The school has clear procedures and protocols for such matters as student conduct, responses to infractions, and the planning of lessons. These are helping to develop common ways of working but are not yet observed consistently enough. The school has much improved the ways in which it identifies and provides for students in danger of falling behind, including those with individual education plans and who are English language learners. It has budgeted well to provide significant extra resources to these groups. Professional development has been well focused on improving the staff's gathering of data and classroom management. The extensive common planning time and the arrangements for inter-visitations strongly support the development of staff skills. Attendance has been boosted significantly, although there is still some way to go to meet the target of 90%. Staff have worked hard to raise parents' involvement in their children's education, but this has proved difficult to achieve. Some lessons take place in unsuitable environments and the school is rightly concerned about the accommodation that will be available to teach its enlarged population next year.

The staff, many of whom are new to the profession, have bonded together well. The principal's approach to distributing responsibility among the faculty, while holding each teacher accountable, is building the capacity of the school to continue its growth. As one parent said, the staff are "getting the roots in the ground so the tree can be strong."

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 made a significant improvement in its collection and analysis of data on student performance since the previous review. It has a program of six marking periods during which staff internally assess and average the scores for student performance. This includes the use of Scantron technology to process the results of externally devised tests in integrated algebra, earth science, and global and US history. Scantron is also used to process test outcomes for English language arts designed by the school. This data is clearly presented on a spreadsheet that tracks student progress across the marking periods and offers an at-a-glance indication of whether it is good enough. To assist its usability, the spreadsheet is color-coded to show, for instance, which students are giving cause for concern. The data is aggregated into groups, by gender and ethnicity, and a tabular presentation indicates which groups are performing better than others. As a result of this analysis, the school has taken action to promote the achievement of boys, who perform worse than girls, by forming a "Young Men's Group". The data is held centrally in well-organized files and each teacher also has a data binder. The staff have been well supported in the improvement of their gathering and collation of data, although variability remains in the confidence of teachers to use computer technology in handling it.

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 school has developed fruitful collaborative processes, not least to fashion the school's three-year strategic plan. This plan is built carefully around the school's "core values" of scholarship, artistry and character, and sets out well-judged priorities on a year-by-year basis until 2009-10. For example, the major drive under the scholarship heading over the past year was improvement in data gathering and next year, in a thoughtful sequence, it is the use of the data to differentiate instruction. The plan indicates success criteria by which the school can evaluate its progress. Departments generate measurable outcomes for their classes, for example that 80% of students will pass a Regents examination with a score of 65% or more. However, these aspirational targets are not based upon a target-setting procedure for each student that is based realistically upon what each one might achieve in each subject. The school uses performance data well, through the oversight of the academic guidance counselor and grade teams, to gain a timely and accurate diagnosis of which students are not performing well enough and who need extra support. The broad goals of the school are understood by stakeholders. For example, parent members of the parent-teacher association are aware of the schools mission to integrate the arts into the curriculum. Parents receive a good flow of information about the progress of their children through the six report cards sent out after each marking period. They can also access data on their children's performance on the school's website. This information is supplemented

through conferences with teachers twice a year, but attendance at these is low. The school has worked hard to raise parental involvement in the school and certain parents are highly committed to its work, but it has little or no regular contact with the majority.

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 principal gives responsibility to his staff to design each departmental curriculum, while holding them to account to ensure that, through the submission of monthly curriculum maps, it is aligned with Regents standards. Staff utilize a common lesson plan but with variation in the precision and quality of learning objectives. Lessons are clearly structured but generally do not allow for differentiation for students at different levels of achievement. The curriculum is broadened well through the partial integration of the arts into other subjects, and arts electives through grades 9 and 10 that cover visual art, dance, creative writing and photography. Students can also choose from a range of after-school programs, which involve toward a quarter of them. One of these is “slam poetry”, through which students of the school have won national awards.

The social environment in classrooms and corridors is improving, and the impact of the school on students’ personal development is seen in the better socialization of grade 10 students than grade 9, as the former have been in the school for a longer period. The staff have a high level of mutual trust and support each other well, and so are good role models for students. Yet several students still find it hard to adopt acceptable behaviors in the school context and make too much noise. This is partly because some lessons are not yet enriched by interesting stimulus material. Students do not always accept the need to listen well enough to each other and interact in a mature way. A superb exception to this was in an after-school slam poetry session in which students presented their own poetry to a group and accepted honest comment on their work.

The physical environment constrains the quality of the education that students receive. All noise echoes loudly around the building, and space is severely restricted. For example, one grade 9 theater lesson had to place in a shared library where many students from other schools were talking with each other. The students themselves do not take enough care to ensure that the school remains a tidy place. Resources and the schedule are aligned well to the needs of students and the school’s overriding priorities. The drive to raise attendance has been successful, with a rise of almost five percentage points over the past year, although the 90% objective has not yet been reached.

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 principal has distributed responsibility effectively to other staff. This has been achieved by an establishing an open and collaborative culture and developing the skills of the staff. For example, the principal is about to devolve budgeting to departments,

who will make bids for resources. Collegiality has developed well through the twice weekly opportunities for common planning time and monthly department meetings. Staff work together increasingly well and have devised a program for intervisitations to learn from each other. The staff are not consistent in their everyday practice, but are cohesive in commitment and intention. The six members of staff who are “teaching artists” and funded by the DreamYard Project are assimilated well as shown, for example, by their adoption of a broadly similar planning framework for lessons. The school has suitable arrangements for inducting the many teachers new to the profession, each of whom has a mentor. Professional development is aligned well to the strategic goals of the school, such as integrating arts into the work of academic subjects. Plans for professional development have also taken sensitive account of the needs of individuals through a consultative process undertaken by the principal. He has a secure understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms, although the capacity to make more frequent observations is limited by the many demands upon his time. The school has clear guidelines on the procedures and protocols that are expected of both students and staff. For example, the ladder of response to indiscipline is plainly stated. As the leadership is aware, the school is not yet a tight ship because procedures are not consistently applied and students have yet, in a number of cases, to mature into young self-regulating people who observe the norms of the school.

The school is still developing its range of partnerships with outside agencies but has a particularly strong and effective liaison with the DreamYard Project. It receives substantial resources that fund the use of teaching artists and the provision of certain materials, and the full-time Project staff give ongoing support to the school’s work.

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.

The principal’s vision for the school’s development gives it a clear sense of direction. To achieve its overarching goals, the school has made important and well-informed strategic decisions for its future development. For example, last year’s priorities to improve data collection, raise attendance and integrate the arts into the wider curriculum were very well judged. Goals for individual teachers to enable them to contribute to the school’s vision are established through conversations with them at the start of the year. They are modified in the light of classroom observation through a well-organized conferencing process. The school does not negotiate measurable long-term goals with each student, nor interim benchmarks for meeting them, and so it does not yet have a secure system for gauging whether each student is progressing fast enough. Nevertheless, the school makes use of the improved data streams to make deft changes to instructional arrangements when necessary. For example, if students are not accumulating credits fast enough, they are targeted for extra help. The school’s agile response to change is further demonstrated by its response to the unexpected admission in September 2007 of 13 English language learners who were at an early stage of learning English. This led to a rapid realignment of instruction, which was then modified in the light of experience at the start of the second semester.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Dream Yard Preparatory School	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?*					
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		

* This sub-population is not represented in the school.

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