



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

**Quality Review Report
Office of Accountability
2008-2009**

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Academy for Environmental Leadership

High School 403

400 Irving Avenue

Brooklyn

NY 11237

Principal: Nilda Katz-Gomez

Dates of review: December 8-9, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Ainslie Cumberbatch

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Academy for Environmental Leadership is a high school with 300 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 28% Black, 70% Hispanic, 1% White, .67% Asian and .33% American Indian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 3% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 82.5%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 86.6% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The Academy for Environmental Leadership (AEL) is in its third year of operation and it shares some facilities, such as the gymnasium and library, with three other schools accommodated within the building. The school, in its three years of existence, has worked hard to establish itself as a school of excellence within the community. The school sets high expectations for students and encourages them to believe in themselves. All staff in the school share the prospect of students' graduating and going to college. The principal and assistant principal provide strong leadership across the school and have the respect of students, staff and parents. The school collects and analyzes data well and has put into place a "Student Tracker" system to monitor student credit accumulation and Regents exam status. Its strong partnership with New Visions provides the school with a wealth of resources. The school maintains other partnerships with Brooklyn College, the Campus Success Center and Hispanic Families Alliance that provide academic and social-emotional support. Although the school uses scholarship data well, it does not disaggregate student data to determine individual needs and to set goals for students. The school does not use data sufficiently to drive individualized instruction and staff do not differentiate lessons sufficiently to challenge and support all students.

The mission of the school is clear with regard to its expectations for students. However, the theme of the school is not currently realized, causing some students frustration. The professional development program at the school works well for new teachers, but is not yet tailored enough to the needs of other staff. The school is working to address this concern. AEL's school structure does not currently ensure that instructional goals are set, monitored and reviewed for each class, subject and grade. In addition, individual students do not have learning goals based on students' self-reflection of their own strengths and weaknesses. The improvement since the last Quality Review has been driven well by the principal and assistant principal, although differentiation in many areas of teaching and learning is not well developed. The inquiry team meets weekly and has been reconstituted to include every teacher in the school. The targeted group for each team includes two to three students identified by the respective teachers. The school is focusing on improving student skills in paraphrasing and summarizing. This initiative is in its infancy stage and, as such, there are no findings to share at this time.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and assistant principal are visible throughout the school and work with teachers daily to improve their professional practice.
- Teachers work collaboratively and collegially within a professional atmosphere of support, trust, reflection and mutual respect.
- The school maintains effective community partnerships to enhance the personal and academic development of students.
- Multiple inquiry teams gather and analyze data well to expand existing practices into a school-wide vision and strategic plan.
- The school frequently generates data about student progress through credit accumulation tracking and the analysis of Regents exam data.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop teachers' use of data, periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to inform planning and instruction.
- Establish measurable short-term goals for students within marking periods that can be used to measure progress and effectiveness of teaching.
- Modify teacher practice to include the use of a variety of tasks and methods to improve differentiation of instruction in all classes.
- Disaggregate school data to identify trends among classes, departments and grades focusing on gender and ethnicity and set actionable goals.
- Refine procedures and incentives to raise levels of student attendance.

Part 3: Main Findings

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

School teams that include the inquiry teams, the attendance committee and grade/content area teams meet several times a week to review a variety of school data to determine priorities and goals. The school uses a student tracking system developed by New Visions called the "Student Tracker" that carefully tracks credit accumulation and Regents performance for every student. This "data snapshot" is organized by cohort and shows student progress toward graduation and college readiness. Historical data on student achievement is available to teachers via an individual student tracking system, which contains information on each student's grades. This information is easily accessible to the teachers of these students and is graphed and color-coded to provide staff with a clear picture of student performance to date. Therefore, the school has the capacity to develop clear goals for each student. The school administration adjusts course schedules, class size and groupings of students to address student needs after reviewing this data. They also administer effectively the Gates McGinitie reading assessment, review classroom and periodic assessment data, as well as NYSESLAT information to identify student areas of strength and need. School data reveals that female students demonstrate a higher attendance rate, outperform male students academically, and have fewer interactions with deans. An intensive counseling program and outreach to parents is in process as the school begins to deal intently with the behavior of male students. However, there is presently little breakdown of the performance of boys and girls relative to one another, or of different ethnic groups to identify patterns and trends among core classes, departments and grades to set actionable goals.

Teachers communicate with students well through advisories to provide guidance on scholarship results, including coursework and Regents exams. They discuss achievement goals and next steps, communicating this information to parents using progress reports every three to four weeks. However, student attendance remains a concern for the school as it is below the City average for high schools and its peer group on the Progress Report. To attract student interest and encourage better attendance, the school revised its curriculum to include several new classes, as well as some new clubs. Nevertheless, student attendance has not improved dramatically and the new courses receive mixed reviews because students do not select the "electives" classes they wish to enroll in, but are assigned instead.

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 principal sets high expectations for students. She communicates her vision for student and adult learning through ongoing conversations with teachers, students, and parents at faculty conferences, grade meetings, inquiry team sessions and parent meetings. Consequently, the school community shares a culture of high expectations. The school's Comprehensive Educational Plan is informed by data from classrooms. However, teacher use of data, periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to inform planning and instruction that is differentiated and supports high expectations is not widespread throughout the school. All faculty are scheduled for a daily common planning time. Teachers and support staff meet several times a week to discuss individual and group progress, review performance and attendance data, and develop interventions. Teachers report that this time allows them, "an opportunity to develop curriculum and become leaders". College advisement is a work in progress as the school prepares for its first graduating class next year and develops systems for introducing college advisement early in high school.

School goals and interventions primarily identify and deal with the progress of students in the areas of credit accumulation and Regents pass rates. Student goals and plans in content area classes are not sufficiently specific. This is because only pockets of the school disaggregate data to determine academic need. The school, in general, focuses mainly on outcomes. As a result, it is difficult to identify progress or the effectiveness of interventions school wide. In addition, goal setting in this area does not involve students and school goals do not incorporate precise measurable outcomes to evaluate progress at suitable intervals.

The school welcomes parent participation and plans to extend an invitation to them to attend advisory sessions. Parents are happy with the school and state that, "I like what I see." Parents appreciate the good communication and the progress reports they receive between marking periods highlighting their children's subject-area progress. However, parents are not clear on the content of the curriculum, the academic goals for their child, or what support they can provide at home. The school is building a more concentrated school-home connection that involves and enables parents to become active partners in the learning process, and ensures that they consistently receive useful information about how their children can improve.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The principal and assistant principal each take primary responsibility for working with several departments and meet with them weekly during the common planning time to support their work. These sessions allow the administrators and teachers to engage in unit planning together and discuss instructional strategies. The school curriculum includes the mandated core subjects and some electives. Students express a desire to see a greater variety of electives and courses that reflect the theme of the school. They describe some of their classes as challenging but suggest increased training for teachers in the use of technology. They cite the lack of access to computers on a regular basis as a basic "need of the school".

The principal makes good budgetary decisions based on identified school needs. Due to an increase in the number of students with individualized education plans, the school

hired two new special education teachers who work closely with grade/content area teachers to support instruction. This connection fosters greater success for special needs students. The English as a second language teacher works collaboratively with his general education colleagues to support the increased number of English language learners to the school. He plans professional development activities for staff focusing on developing literacy strategies across content areas. The school makes scheduling decisions that support collegiality and professional development. For example, the math team plans units during the common planning time that, in turn, are downloaded to Google Docs so that other teachers are able to view and learn from them.

The school introduced Cornell notetaking to current social studies classes as a strategy to aid in content knowledge retention and build student competency in the area of essay writing. Subsequently, students are developing good skills in this area. However, not all classes are engaging and involve students in their learning. Teachers infrequently use interactive whiteboard technology, digital projectors and laptops to motivate students. Some teachers use formal and informal data to differentiate instruction, but this tends to guide the grouping of students and does not focus sufficiently upon the adaptation of approaches and resources to meet the needs of all students. All students often work on the same activity at the same time, even though they may be working in groups or pairs. This may lead to stagnated learning for some students.

Very positive relationships exist among staff and students, which promote the academic and personal development of students and encourage the professional development of the staff. One student stated, "Teachers try to help us and they say things like, 'I know you can do well'". These relationships serve to motivate students.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Teachers and guidance counselors generate three goals for the school year, which inform ongoing professional development for staff. Staff revise these goals during the year as needed. New teachers benefit from supportive mentoring by colleagues in their content area. Some teachers also receive training through the Fellows program. New Visions supports this work by providing training for mentors. New teachers also meet once a week during common planning time with their colleagues to plan together, share effective practices and receive targeted support.

The principal and assistant principal model lessons, schedule intervisitations with schools across the campus and lead discussions on teaching and learning to enhance teachers' skills. They conduct informal observations every day and schedule formal observations. Teachers remark that this year the feedback from administrators is, "practical and more tailored to specific needs". As a result, they reflect that they more readily work on the areas highlighted. However, despite teacher input in terms of their individual needs, professional development is often presented as, "one size fits all". The school administration is conscious of this concern and is working with teachers to meet this need.

Building on the work of the inquiry team last year, the school now includes all teachers in multiple inquiry teams. The targeted group for each team includes two to three students identified by the respective teachers. The school is focusing on improving student skills in paraphrasing and summarizing. They believe that if students develop greater

competency with these skills they will do better in their writing. They are in the infancy stage with this initiative and do not have any data to review at this time.

The school has a strong partnership with New Visions and uses their resources to leverage instruction at the school. In addition, the school also collaborates effectively with the American Museum of Natural History to enhance the quality of instruction in the Living Environment curriculum using curriculum and materials, as well as the services of an on-site coach to support teachers. Students like the additional resources and the approach of the teaching.

Students describe the school as “safe” and all feel that they have an adult who they can talk to if they need support. They describe their principal as, “hardworking, caring and peppy”. Parents like the fact that the principal refers to the students as “my kids”. There is a strong focus on students’ personal growth that is evident in the discussions that take place at teacher meetings and in advisory sessions.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The principal has a clear vision of school improvement as she works toward her first graduating class. She is confident that all her students can overcome any obstacles, graduate from high school and embark on post-secondary education. The school community shares this vision and helps to energize staff as the school moves through a transformational phase. School staff recognize that students need to internalize classroom material in order to succeed on course and Regents exams. The school has made some progress in improving the social studies and English language arts curriculum to provide students with a stronger content base and literacy skills to be more successful. The school also appreciates that daily instruction must consistently interest and engage students. However, differentiated instruction is not yet widespread throughout the school and, as such, the school is not meeting the needs of every learner. Consequently, the focus of school capacity building is on curriculum and instructional improvement. The school community’s recognition of these areas for improvement drives further goal setting and improvement planning effectively.

The school uses whole-school data well to make year-on-year comparisons in evaluating whether the progress students make is adequate when set against their prior performance. However, the school’s scholarship results indicate that the school is not yet closely analyzing student-specific data and using it effectively to set goals to accelerate individual student progress. Similarly, the goals that the school sets for students’ learning currently lack clearly defined interim markers against which to measure the progress that each student is making, to ensure that any necessary modifications are identified early and that action is taken.

The school administration is working to develop goals for whole-school strategic improvement, including timeframes against which to measure progress and criteria against which to measure success. This reflects the school’s determination to achieve ongoing improvement.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Academy for Environmental Leadership	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score		X		
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>				
	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?		X		
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>				
	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?		X		
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYQ, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?		X					
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X					
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X					
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?		X					
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X				
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X				
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X				
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?		X					
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?		X					
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X				
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed