



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

School for Democracy and Leadership

Middle-High School 533

**600 Kingston Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Rebecca Ostro

Dates of review: November 19 – 20, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Alvin Jeffs

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The School for Democracy and Leadership is a middle-high school with 435 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 92% Black, 6% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 93.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 61% eligibility.

The school is in its fifth year in a building, which opened in 1954. It shares a wide range of facilities, including a gym, an auditorium, a cafeteria and sports hall. Virtually all staff are in their first five years of teaching and a significant number are new to the school and teaching. The principal has been in post for four months, having been assistant principal before that.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The School for Democracy and Leadership is a school that has made many strong and effective developments in its management, even since the previous Quality Review in May 2008. It has a strong database, which it uses well to identify the progress of individual students and to set goals. The data analysis processes are now fully in use by most members of the school community in order to assist in lesson planning, pick out students in need of additional support and to map trends within grades and subject departments. All of this data is shared openly with students and parents, who express pleasure at the whole-hearted commitment that all staff have to their children.

The most dramatic development is with regard to data usage within the school. Senior staff have modeled this very well in the way that they use data to identify areas for development and then evaluate progress towards solutions. This is particularly effective in the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan and is now included as a regular part of all discussions by teaching teams and planning committees. Students and their families see the curriculum as both appropriate and effective. A wide range of activities developed by CAMBA, the school's very strong partner, admirably enriches the general curriculum. This partnership has expanded expertise within the school and offers many opportunities for students to "top up" their skills. It has also introduced a very rich mixture of activity-based subjects, from drama to a successful internship program.

The school is now characterized by a sense of trust and collaboration between staff. This has not always been the case and is an area where surveys and very open discussions between administration and teaching staff have established a clear way forward. An excellent professional development program has assisted staff in the development of differentiation and learning goal skills that all regard as a very real success.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has a strong system for analyzing a wide range of data and converting this analysis into practical developments to assist student progress.
- The majority of staff use data on a regular basis to plan, teach and assess student development.
- Teachers are well supported in new initiatives by a thorough and well-differentiated professional development program.
- There is excellent collaboration at all levels within the school and this provides good support for new staff and contributes to the regular sharing of information about students experiencing difficulties.
- Parents and students value the very real interest shown by the principal and her staff, which they say contributes significantly to the improvements in students' self-esteem and academic achievement.
- A strong partnership with CAMBA enriches the curriculum significantly and provides the school with a rich network of community links.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to provide support and training to staff who experience difficulties in developing differentiation within their planning and teaching.
- Ensure that all staff identify regular points at which to discuss progress with individual students, linking these discussions with clear short-term targets.
- Seek ways of further using technology to provide all school and grade leaders with the full range of available data and the tools with which to analyze and disseminate that data.
- Continue to provide structured opportunities for teaching staff to share good classroom practice across the grades and departments.

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.

In addition to the wide range of external data that the school receives, it now processes a rich vein of teacher observation, periodic quizzes, tests and samples of student work. This, together with precise information on attendance, lateness and behavior, provides a strong basis with which to analyze students' academic and personal development. This is evident within English language arts and, following excellent professional support, in math in the middle school. It is also apparent in social studies, where rigorous and imaginative systems of data collection have developed. This has added greater rigor to this department's ways of working. The thorough analysis of data allows a clear identification of at risk groups. In 2007-08, senior staff recognized that there were deficiencies in the progress of high attaining students and those finding accomplishment of basic skills difficult. In particular, scrutiny of data raised the troubling question of how to assist over-age and held-back students move on. This analysis was quickly converted into action. A seventh period was created to allow time for a challenging curriculum relating to higher achieving students and to assist other students catch up and fill gaps in their learning. In addition, middle school specialty classes have allowed the introduction of more challenging courses, such as advanced earth science and Saturday academy classes. Students indicate that these initiatives are popular and successful.

Students and parents attest to the open and detailed way in which staff discuss individual student progress. They say that "we always talk about what to do next" in student and parent conferences. They use the on-line grading system to look at their children's grades and attendance. Students indicate that they have regular opportunities in English language arts, math and social studies to look at strengths and weaknesses and identify the next short-term learning goal. Similar processes to establish goals occur with science, but work to establish effective target-setting procedures with students to maximize the rate of student learning is incomplete. The processes that are effective rely on the prompt relaying of data to all staff. Much is electronically based, but the way data is stored and available to all staff is underdeveloped.

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.

Collaboration is a very real strength of this school. The size of the school allows the rapid and effective transfer of information and the natural growth of teamwork. With the development of departmental chairs in each of the main subject areas there is strong

collaboration that relates to curriculum development and goal setting. Grade teams are well led and provide the full range of specialist teachers to discuss and plan for each grade level of student. Both of these sets of teams have learned a lot from the rigor and accountability modeled by senior staff within the school. This, in turn, has added to the clarity with which they analyze and adapt curriculum initiatives. The model is epitomized in the way the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan is developed. The plan grows on the basis of information and comment received from each subject and grade team. In addition, each area for concern, arising from evaluations of the previous year, has its own teacher committee for research and recommendations.

Wide participation is apparent in the school leadership team, where there is significant parent and student involvement, and in the frequent use of focus groups and surveys. The school's mission statement emphasizes empowerment of staff, students and parents and this underlies all of the school's strategic goals. The Comprehensive Education Plan is characterized by clear, measurable outcomes and timeframes. These qualities underpin all requests from the administration and are becoming second nature to every initiative within the school. Thus, each subject department is now setting end-of-year goals, which are quantified and have interim benchmarks to indicate the rate of progress to those goals.

It is clear from attainment charts on bulletin boards that rigor is demonstrated through the high expectations across the school and is now an integral part of most lessons. Thus, grade 10 social science lessons incorporate weekly one-on-one reviews of progress charts. In grade 7 lessons, students are presented with progress bar charts from two years and asked to analyze them. This is an imaginative initiative and one that draws students into the skills of self-assessment and analysis. A student sums up the process, by saying, "They all want us to excel."

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 proficient.

The respect with which all members of the school treat each other, the concern they show for each other's progress and the openness with which everyone discusses student progress are the key components in the school's success. There is a tangible interest in each student and an emphasis on providing the best possible experience within school. This is also linked to the universal wish to cultivate, in the words of the mission statement, "leaders and learners who are agents of change and responsible citizens".

The curriculum provides a sound basis for learning across all core subjects. Programs are aligned with State standards, as are the assessment activities within each unit of work. The openness and professionalism demonstrated by the principal is replicated in all staff and underlies the programs they develop for students at an individual level. The "advisory" lessons occur every other day and allow an opportunity for students to relate to a member of staff who focuses on personal needs. The new resources for these lessons deal effectively with the world of work as well as individual qualities and skills. They provide an excellent opportunity for students to identify concerns and anxieties and for staff to help work them through. This core is enriched by the after-school activities

that have supported under-achieving students well. In addition, CAMBA has provided a wide range of trips and activities that are well received by students and parents alike.

Concern for student progress is clear in most classrooms. The majority of teachers use data and observation to match students as closely as possible to work that challenges and develops them. There is wide usage of information to identify groups, based on ability, learning style and need. There are also widely used procedures for regular discussions of progress with each and every student. Most teachers have built this into their daily classroom management. Some still have work to do on using the power of groups to accelerate learning. However, all find time outside of lessons to talk through learning goals in detail with students.

Strategic decisions also reflect the wish to move students on. Weaker math results have led to the appointment of a very effective coach. The need for more collaboration time has seen the implementation of frequent common planning times. Scheduling has been carefully adjusted to provide after-school time for students with special educational needs. Interim data indicates that this has been very effective in raising standards of literacy for the 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 well developed.

The powerhouse for the good developments that have taken place may be found in alignment of capacity. A thorough and personalized program of professional development has grown on the basis of detailed classroom observations and "intensives", where these observations form the basis of detailed discussion and training with each grade team. The principal and two assistants work as a closely-knit team and this ensures that the messages each grade team receives are consistent. All staff have received high quality training in differentiated learning and the use of data and questioning. Experienced staff work closely with senior staff to develop their practice, usually strengthened by inter-visitations with other schools. The group of less experienced teachers receive an intensive but sensitive program that relates to classroom management and the better planning of group work. All staff indicate that this approach has worked exceptionally well in developing the spread of good classroom practice.

The inquiry team completed a very effective project last year relating to the best means of supporting special education students. The practical spin-offs have been impressive. The development of small classes and co-teaching, together with a sharp focus on reading skills, is already beginning to show results. This year's team, the seven grade leaders, is using classroom observation to address needs that are specific to their students. Thus, grade 9 is looking closely at the linkages between achievement and attendance, while grade 6 is concerned with maintaining the grades achieved by higher-attaining students. When available, it is intended to share outcome details across the school.

The very strong partnership with CAMBA also ensures that the school can access a wide range of community-based services, including an extremely effective social worker, youth literacy services and critical thinking groups. Further work with Brooklyn College,

“Safe Horizon”, “Global Kids”, and “Scholars in Training” has allowed this school to successfully supplement its curriculum by making available additional academic challenges and opportunities at a social and academic level for many of its students.

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 proficient.

The school’s self-evaluation indicates that they have a very real understanding of how far the school has come and what are the needs for the current year. They are satisfied with the progress of new initiatives and seek to use the forthcoming year to evaluate the impact these processes have on student achievement. They know there are areas for improvement and already identifying resources to assist in these developments.

The administrative team has been rigorous in their analysis of the wide range of data available to them from outside the school and from every classroom within. The fact that they have clear end-of-year goals and regular “benchmark” dates means that not only do they have a sharp picture of how targets have been met but they know when data is telling them to adjust the course they have set. The development of the school’s behavior policy is a good indication of how responsive these interim checkpoints have been. During 2007 - 08 there was a strong focus on behavior and the improvement in detention, incident and suspension rates. On review, senior staff realized that a punitive approach was not working. This, in turn, led them to develop more preventative strategies, developing a “caring beings” program for instance, and these worked well.

Others to are encouraged to copy when such a model of reflective practice works. The careful analysis of mid-year data and the use of September and November benchmarks at the start of year have enabled grade and subject teams to identify positive and negative trends and adapt accordingly. As all staff work in both grade and subject teams, each of them has been involved in this program of rigorous goal-setting and reviewing. It is now something that most teachers incorporate into their daily classroom practice. The rigor of using interim goals and evaluation is something that is still developing among teachers.

All share the school’s vision. It stresses and seeks the empowerment of everyone connected to the school. It sees respect and honesty as the basis for the best supportive relationships. It has only one major goal, to assist every student to make the best use of the opportunities available to them. While some processes have yet to run the course of a full academic year to be proven and a few staff have work to carry out in developing their classroom skills, this is a vision that is already showing significant results in the interim.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: School for Democracy and 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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed