

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

The School for Discovery and Exploration

Elementary School 503

330 59 Street

Brooklyn

NY 11220

Principal: Bernadette Fitzgerald

Dates of review: March 24 - 25, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Karina Costantino

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The School for Discovery and Exploration is an elementary school with 819 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 2% Black, 80% Hispanic, 4% White, and 14% Asian students. The student body includes 46% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 94.8%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 88% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal promotes a strong vision for the future of the school in a spirit of collaboration among staff, students, and parents. There is a nurturing, caring, and respectful environment, where students enjoy their learning. The school analyzes a wide range of data well and uses it to meet the needs of students. The current school goals are clear in English language arts, math, and science. Teachers are beginning to develop long-term goals in the other core areas, but this is not consistent throughout the school.

Professional development is strong in the school, allowing teachers to form study groups on and across grades to plan instruction effectively. Teachers are beginning to receive professional development in the differentiation of instruction for students, but this is not evident in most classroom instruction for those students performing at a higher level. The school is continuing to look at their high performing students and extending the work that has begun in some classrooms to provide them with effective challenge. Students and teachers express the desire to use computers but the school does not have a strong technology program.

School leaders invest in academic intervention teachers on each grade to push in to the classroom. Special education and English language learner teachers push in, as well. This allows each of these sub-groups to receive differentiation of instruction. These teachers share the same planning time that further allows them to concentrate on the very special needs of the particular sub-groups so they can achieve success.

Art and music weave their way throughout the entire curriculum through the participation of a number of outside residencies, providing a nurturing, rich learning environment for students. Parents feel welcome in the building and feel that they can approach the principal and staff with any concerns they may have. They appreciate the personal and academic support that leaders and teachers provide for their children. Parents actively participate in the school leadership team, which develops the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Teachers and administrators are collecting a wide range of informative student progress data and are now extending this to subjects beyond English language arts, math, and science.
- Students with particular needs, including special education students and English language learners, benefit from targeted, caring support according to their needs and so achieve success.
- The principal, senior leaders and teachers create a nurturing, caring, and respectful environment, where students enjoy their learning.
- Professional growth is a high priority, so the reflective faculty profit from varied opportunities to share and develop strengths as individuals and members of the teaching community.
- The school is reflective, seeking to continually develop, and uses data to plan realistically for future improvements with students as the focus.
- The leadership and teachers provide academic and personal support for all students and the parents are enthusiastic and appreciative about the quality of education their children receive

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that teachers differentiate all lessons and content areas to challenge all students, particularly to extend the learning of higher achievers.
- Implement an action plan to extend the use of technology as a vehicle for increasing relevance and real applications into the curriculum, to engage students in project-based learning.
- Enable all teachers to develop their practice in creating individual learning goals for students that define the next steps in achieving long-term goals in all core subjects.
- Continue to support teachers' capacity to differentiate instruction based on student achievement data in all core subjects.

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 leaders collect, analyze, and interpret formative and summative data in multiple ways that give the school a clear picture of the needs of students. Teachers meet on three common planning periods a week to discuss and monitor curriculum mapping which enables them to pace instruction effectively throughout the school year. The school uses Teachers College Assessment Pro software to gather and analyze reading data across classes and grades. Kindergarten through grade 5 teachers administer running records, including Teachers College reading and writing project periodic assessments, a minimum of five times a year, which also tracks and benchmarks student progress. Three times a year, teachers administer the Design Your Own (DYO) assessments in math and enter results into spreadsheets that allow faculty to note trends and progress in math within the school. The school administers "on demand" writing assignments to students and grades them along the Teacher's College writing continuum, which looks at student progress on a developmental continuum. This effectively allows the school to note progress in the reading writing connection. In collaboration with the magnet coach, teachers create rubrics, set goals and track progress effectively throughout the building in science. As a magnet school, the teachers are beginning to develop rubrics in social studies and the arts to track and benchmark progress in these core subjects. Goal setting and the differentiation of instruction for high performing students as a subgroup are not apparent in most classrooms.

The parents express positive feedback as to their participation at the school. They are enthusiastic about the quality of education their children receive and are very appreciative of the academic and personal support the staff provide. Throughout the year, the parent coordinator offers workshops to parents in a variety of languages. The principal offers a breakfast for parents monthly where they freely discuss their concerns and challenges. At every parent teacher meeting, the principal begins with a read aloud to model the importance of literacy and the parents receive the book for their child's library. All of this provides a risk-free, nurturing environment to validate the role of parents in their child's education.

The school enjoys a high attendance rate throughout the year and this is because school leaders have developed a telephone system to notify parents the first day their child is absent. Parents applaud the system and appreciate the personal touch the school provides.

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 establishes clear measurable goals in English language arts, math, and science. Teachers meet on common planning periods to develop lessons, discuss strategies, and revisit individual student goals. There is also the spirit of collaboration among teachers in the classroom as they plan lessons and develop strategies for subgroups of children to improve

student outcomes. Differentiation of lessons for high performing students is an area that still needs growth to enable these children to receive challenging instruction in all core subjects. Although school leaders and staff bring in a number of enrichment opportunities for children, they do not specifically target goals for their higher performing students. Consequently, there is insufficient challenge for higher performing students and long-term goal setting for these students is not evident.

A particular challenge for the school is math, where students do not show as much progress as they do in English language arts. To address this challenge, the school has two math coaches who are implementing a “balanced math” constructivist curriculum. There are also math grade leaders who assist with units of study to plan across the grade. Math in the City provides professional development to teachers and coaches. Teachers use blocks of time in which they analyze their DYO and predicative assessments to benchmark student performance and note progress to determine next steps. An interim assessment parent-reporting tool that all teachers use informs parents of student goals in math. The school leadership believes this approach is working and intends to explore using it in other core areas, as well.

The school leadership team actively participates in developing the Comprehensive Educational Plan. Parents on the team are knowledgeable about the areas of need within the building and the direction the school is taking to improve student outcomes. The school leadership team discusses trends in data throughout the year, and continually revises the Comprehensive Educational Plan to address those trends. All teachers are aware of the school’s instructional priorities and familiarize themselves with the Comprehensive Educational Plan.

The learning environment in the school celebrates student achievement, highlighting student work throughout the building in all subject areas. Students receive awards for high attendance and the school has a high attendance rate helping to create an atmosphere of high achievement.

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 principal, senior leaders and teachers create a nurturing, caring, and respectful environment, where students enjoy their learning and love to attend school. Students indicate that teachers are always willing to assist them in any area of academic need. Art weaves its way through all subject areas and the school has a challenging magnet program, which integrates all subjects into a school-wide focus on ecology and the urban environment. The magnet teacher works closely with the classroom teachers to establish student goals. An additional music teacher provides the kindergarten with a rich music experience and students benefit from a number of residencies across grades, such as ballroom dancing. Students also participate in Teacher’s College book clubs, which set rigorous standards in literacy, creating high expectations for students in reading and writing.

The school uses a push in model for accommodating English language learners and special education students. This effectively utilizes the time for instruction. In addition, it provides the opportunity for teachers to team-teach during the shared reading time and differentiate instruction for the students when they work in cooperative groups. There is also the spirit of collaboration among teachers in these classrooms as they plan lessons and develop strategies for subgroups of children to improve student outcomes. Students and teachers express the desire to use technology in the classroom. They spoke of the opportunity to use technology and smart-boards to meet the needs of higher performing children in a number of projects based learning activities.

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.

Professional growth is a high priority so the faculty profits from varied opportunities to share and develop strengths as individuals and members of the teaching community. New teachers attend a new teacher academy during the summer providing them with the opportunity to set up their learning environments and attend workshops on school instructional priorities. Developing a school based option all teachers receive twenty professional development periods throughout the year. In addition to staff development provided with programs currently in the school, such as Math in the City, teachers also benefit from taking part in study groups across grades based on their individual needs. School leaders determine the focus of the study group in collaboration with the teachers based on snapshot visits to classrooms. All staff members are aware of their own personal mastery and this creates a reflective community in which they support each other. An example of this is the workshop offered by the special education teacher to clarify differentiation of instruction and setting specific learning goals for students exhibiting special needs. All of these supports result in strong collaboration among teachers to improve student outcomes. Classroom teachers have effectively implemented some of these strategies and are seeing improvement with newly arrived English language learners.

The inquiry team meets weekly and has chosen newly arrived English language learners throughout the grades as its target population. Analyzing a variety of data, the team creates a number of strategies to improve learning outcomes for these students and shares these strategies with classroom teachers throughout the school to provide effective conditions of learning for English language learners in every grade.

Support personnel receive the same common planning time as the grade they service, which enables them to articulate strategies and carefully watch progress towards long-term goals. The community at the School for Discovery and Exploration is truly a reflective one and teachers continually support and share with each other.

The school makes effective use of a number of outside partnerships that support parents and the academic and emotional growth students. The Center for Family Life provides parents with many opportunities from child rearing to assuming the role of class parent, actively involving parents with their child's classroom. The Tribe program builds character and develops self-esteem throughout the school by discussing rules to live by and this is evident throughout the classrooms. As a result, the tone of the building is respectful and focused on learning

School leaders provide many opportunities for professional development for staff on and across grades. School leaders observe all teachers formally and informally. The informal snapshot visits enable teachers to receive feedback throughout the year towards meeting their individual professional goals. This feedback drives the professional development and school leaders differentiate professional development to meet individual goals. Teachers receive support from coaches, colleagues, and study groups across grades, which enable them to improve student outcomes. Teachers are positive about professional development and express that it is a particular strength of their school.

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.

School leaders model reflection and encourage reflection among teachers, parents, and children creating life long learners. They continually develop and use data during scheduled weekly and monthly meetings to plan realistically for future improvements with students as their focus. Goal setting and bench marking goals is strong in English language arts, math, and science. The school is moving towards establishing goals in the other core subjects to improve student academic outcomes. Goals in social studies are evident in some classrooms, but not all.

School leaders continually meet with teachers to inform instructional practice. Snapshot visits to classrooms provide teachers with necessary feedback as it relates to the progress of their children. This is true not only of their instructional strategies, but also of student outcomes, as well. The principal arranges for visitation to successful schools in the school's peer group to investigate best practices for implementation at P.S. 503. School leadership meets with all coaches and professional developers to continually monitor teaching practice and applaud best practice to share with all staff. All teachers realize the need for improving their differentiation of lessons in all core areas and welcome opportunities to do that with support from school leaders. All teachers indicate the desire to use technology in their classroom and the school recognizes this as an overall need within the school. School leadership is currently exploring avenues to purchase new computers for classrooms, as well as Smart boards, including the professional development necessary to train teachers. The principal would also like to create a more effective school webpage shared by students, teachers, and parents.

The principal promotes a strong vision for the future of the school in a spirit of collaboration among staff, students, and parents.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: School for Discovery and Exploration	△	➤	✓	+
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, DY0, 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