

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

**New York City Laboratory School for Collaborative
Studies**

Middle School 312

**333 West 17 Street
Manhattan
NY 10011**

Principal: Megan Adams

Dates of review: March 16 – 17, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Daria Rigney

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

New York City Laboratory School for Collaborative Studies is a middle school with 580 students from grade 6 through grade 9. The school population comprises 5% Black, 8%Hispanic, 40% White, and 46% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 97.6%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The new principal, in her post for only eight months, has already established a clear message about the importance of making databased instruction the centerpiece of the school's mission. Parents and teachers give the principal high marks on her responsiveness to their concerns and the value she places on collaborative problem solving. The principal has begun to establish a foundation for the school to move forward in its ability to analyze student data by instituting a variety of opportunities for teachers to collaborate on both grade levels and within subject areas. Teachers are learning how to analyze relevant data and assess student work so that instructional plans target specific student needs and support students in reaching challenging goals.

The school values collaboration among students across all subject areas as well as among faculty members on grade levels and within departments. It is especially proud of its long-standing collaborative team teaching classes on each grade and the interventions in place to support special education students to achieve their individualized educational plan goals. The school is not as effective in supporting and challenging all students. It does not make sufficient use of student data to plan and teach flexible and challenging lessons that contain opportunities for all students to reach their learning goals. There is not yet an overall analysis of the academic achievement of sub-groups to develop a cohesive plan for accelerated growth.

Teachers use a wide variety of data sources in evaluating student learning including class tests, projects, periodic assessments and state tests. However, the school has not achieved any consistent practice of measuring student progress and revising teaching strategies to meet students' needs. While students appreciate the multiple opportunities to learn collaboratively, they are eager to play a greater part in developing their learning goals. At times, they feel that they do "stuff we already learned".

The school has identified the right priorities for improvement. The principal is working with the faculty to develop a challenging and engaging curriculum that also aligns closely with students' needs in both content and skills acquisition. At the outset of the school year, teachers developed individualized professional development goals. The principal uses these as a lens for monitoring growth and planning differentiated professional development opportunities. She provides consistent and ongoing feedback to teachers after her observations. The school is beginning to use this data to establish the link between curricular goals and student learning goals to demonstrate the critical role goal-setting plays in raising student achievement.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has implemented a clear and differentiated professional development plan based on her observations of classroom instruction, student outcomes, and individual teacher goals.
- The school implements a variety of initiatives for collaboration among guidance and pedagogical staff to improve attendance and support students' social and emotional growth to raise achievement.
- The principal and the staff communicate high expectations about attendance, collaborative study, and academic performance to families.
- The principal has established strong staff relationships with good opportunities for collaboration for teacher and student goal setting.
- A culture of trust and mutual respect is evident among the principal and the teaching staff

What the school needs to improve

- Establish systems for analyzing student data in all subjects to enable teachers to track student progress over time.
- Use collaborative and data-informed processes to generate student goals, which inform the implementation of differentiated classroom instruction.
- Provide specific, consistent, and regular feedback to students so that they are actively involved in setting and articulating their learning goals.
- Analyze performance data on all sub-groups, especially Hispanic, Black and gender groups, in order to target instruction and improve achievement.
- Ensure that curricular goals are challenging and engaging for all students by consistently monitoring the support and challenge for diverse student needs.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The school does not have well-established data management systems in place at this time. Although teachers use a variety of data sources to determine students' proficiencies and needs in some subject areas, there is inconsistency in both the kinds of data and the strategies for analysis. There is no overall strategy in place to analyze the performance of some subgroups, particularly Hispanic and Black students and by gender. The principal has instituted regularly scheduled meetings, across departments and grades, during which teachers receive support in analyzing state exam data, periodic assessment information and student work. In addition, the faculty has started the work of developing and using rubrics for assessing students' writing and math strengths and needs in order to establish a clear understanding of anticipated learning outcomes for all students. The school uses ARIS effectively to monitor attendance data and extend outreach to students.

Teachers use rubrics quarterly for measuring students' progress in the area of collaboration but are not collecting and analyzing students' academic performance data with the same consistency or commitment. The faculty has begun to analyze an array of data points in order to understand more fully the range of students' learning needs and strengths, including state exams and their design-your-own periodic assessments. Aligning the assessments across the grades has been an important step toward developing dependable and dynamic tools.

Twice a year, the school shares narrative reports with parents of students in grades 7 and 8, which describe and evaluate progress in both academic and social areas. Students in grade 6 are required to complete a self-reflection on general goal setting in subject areas in addition to the teacher narrative. However, this does not include specific information on students' next learning steps. Teachers have high expectations for students but the school does not have a consistent practice for measuring student progress over time.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The administration's commitment to data-driven teaching and learning has opened the door for teachers to begin to connect the data to goal setting for student learning. Teachers have relied heavily on summative assessments, primarily state tests, in planning instruction resulting in goal setting with limited capacity for measuring progress towards those goals. The school has not yet determined how it will set interim benchmarks for student achievement in all subjects to focus teaching and align

classroom instruction closely with improved student outcomes. The administration is actively involving teachers in using student information to generate dynamic and flexible goals for students through differentiated instructional practices.

The principal has led the staff in setting benchmarks for student learning and establishing goals for individual students. In the area of math, this work in connecting data to goal setting has led to a diagnostic tool to prepare students for integrated algebra. In the area of humanities, it led to teachers' identifying the need for explicit teaching of reading strategies and habits to support students in understanding more complex texts. The school has not yet embedded the practice of using data to generate and implement strategic goal setting across all subject areas and applying them to all students, including the highest performers.

The principal works effectively with the school leadership team in establishing whole-school goals that are the product of a careful analysis of both the Learning Environment Survey and the progress report. There is clear evidence of the school moving toward achieving these goals. This includes improved communication with teachers and parents, more responsive professional development, and full participation of all teachers in inquiry projects. The school has recently established a website for families to access information.

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 school has developed a cohesive initiative in math, using the integrated algebra curriculum to plan a course of study using backward planning design for setting curricular benchmarks. In humanities, projects offer students opportunities to read and write in a variety of genres while offering multiple perspectives on particular topics. While projects involve complex ideas, students rightly feel that teachers could differentiate reading assignments and increase the pace of learning. Teachers planning a curriculum that emphasized writing conventions made effective use of data from the state English language arts examination.

While teachers deliver instruction with high expectations and state standards in mind, there is little evidence of the implementation of differentiated instruction on a consistent basis. Students are engaged in curricular assignments with an expectation that they will collaborate with their peers towards whole-class projects and goals. When they do not live up to these expectations, not all teachers are able to pinpoint specific steps along the learning continuum where students require additional support in acquiring content knowledge, processes or skills. While teaching expertise is growing through professional development opportunities, there is still significant variability in practice and knowledge necessary to implement a coherent, school-wide curriculum.

The principal encourages teachers to use assessment data in goal setting with the expectation that this data will result in differentiated classroom instruction. The principal and her cabinet, including two leadership interns, have analyzed information from the Learning Environment Survey specifically related to communication and have built new and forthright methods of ensuring that teachers and parents are full partners in decision making.

Teachers and guidance counselors work closely together to forge a secure communication system to support students in achieving academic growth.

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.

The principal has established the practice of frequent classroom observations, both formal and informal, optimizing these opportunities to provide feedback to teachers. Her consistent presence in classrooms, focused on evidence of the use of data to plan instruction, combined with her dependable feedback has created a culture of rigorous expectations and unwavering support for her staff. Teachers welcome the opportunities provided by the principal to develop their own learning goals in creating individualized professional development plans. They are highly motivated by the principal's query, "What do you need?" energized by the involvement this gives them in leading their own learning.

The school has included all teachers on inquiry teamwork and established grade level teams to examine a target population of students for whom collaboration is challenging. Although the principal and the school community are committed to the inquiry process, they have not investigated specific academic learning targets for students in specific subgroups whose achievement or progress is below par.

The faculty has been engaged in frequent visits between and among teachers in order to develop coherence in their language, their goals, and their practice. The school has planned visits to other schools with similar data for the near future.

There is a comprehensive, well-thought-out plan which supports students in their academic and social growth. This involves guidance staff, the special education coordinator, teaching staff, administration, and the parent coordinator. The school has an effective safety net system in place that identifies students who are experiencing emotional or academic difficulties, enabling it to provide the necessary interventions or outreach to families.

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 understands the critical connection between improved teaching practices and students reaching increasingly challenging goals. Consequently, there are processes in place for teachers to revise their teaching plans to target student needs through differentiated instruction. The staff are motivated to learn improved methods of creating tiered lesson plans to more accurately address specific student needs. However, at this point, implementation is uneven, at best, either for students who require additional support or those needing strategies for accelerated learning. Teachers welcome the support that they are receiving from administration and the latitude to try out more sophisticated and nuanced methods for improving student gains as they acquire more skillful teaching techniques.

At the classroom level, teachers use a variety of assessment data. This includes periodic assessments, class tests, projects, and state tests in conjunction with curriculum maps and pacing calendars to plan day-to-day instruction. However, there is no consistent system to continuously monitor and revise the effectiveness of teaching practices, as demonstrated by their effect on student outcomes.

While teachers have begun to develop professional goals for improving their instructional practices, the school is in the early stages of incorporating a holistic approach to a cycle of reflection and revision as an organization. As teachers become increasingly proficient in establishing flexible interim goals for students and reflecting on their own effectiveness in supporting students, the school intends to move toward sustaining continuous improvement in a systematic manner. The principal aligns her supervision and support for these teacher-generated goals while evaluating the effectiveness of teaching practices in improving student achievement. She also uses a tracking system to monitor her schedule of supervision and support to ensure her effectiveness in assessing the staff's progress towards meeting their goals.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: NYC Laboratory School for Collaborative Studies	△	➤	✓	+
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>	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