

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

The Francis Lewis School

Elementary School 79

**147-27 15th Drive
Queens
NY11357**

Principal: Paula Marron

**Dates of review: April 6-7, 2009
Lead Reviewer: Sheryl L. Watkins**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Francis Lewis School is an elementary school with 829 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 0.5% Black, 15% Hispanic, 55% White, and 29.5% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 95.7%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

This school “feels like a family,” stated several parents and many of the staff members. It is abundantly apparent upon entering the school that respect for each other and for learning is of paramount importance. The collaborative efforts of all school personnel create a climate in which learning is valued, where parents appreciate the consideration and motivation that accelerates learning, and where students feel safe and cared for.

The principal is an effective leader who, since taking over the leadership of the school in September, works untiringly with her faculty to create an environment where student performance and progress are of very high priority and where students want to come to learn. Affection, welcome and sincere interest greet children at the door; “It amazes me,” remarked one mother, “that she (the assistant principal) remembers so much about what so many kids have told her.” Students want to come to school, and proudly report that “we learn something new every day.”

Motivation for and celebration of learning are priorities for the principal, who has found unique ways to champion learning. Members of the school community celebrate learning by participating in lunchtime book talks and collaborative meetings to write and plan curriculum. Reflection on practices is consistent, and results in adaptations to systems, structures and instruction to assure ongoing achievement. There is evident urgency to achieve the schools mission to “promote an environment that encourages both independent and cooperative learning and supports students, as they become analytical problem-solvers.”

Plans are underway to increase the effective communication systems currently in place. In addition to creating a parent handbook, the school has designed a series of workshops for parents to dig deeper into the literacy and math programs in the school. This is designed to enable parents to become even more active in supporting their child’s learning at home, and to provide support for the crafting and attainment of instructional goals.

“We know that our underlying goal is that, instead of a destination, it is a journey we have undertaken, knowing there are lessons to be learned, in order to be the best we can be”. Stated by one educator, and echoed by many others, the school continues to make strides in building on their achievements and making greater progress, especially in the analysis and application of data. Attention to goal setting for students and staff is a developing feature.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Teachers work very effectively in collaborative teams to analyze data, and to plan curriculum and instruction.
- Staff collaborate well, assist each other professionally and are positive role models for their students who feel safe, cared for and eager to learn.
- The effective and expanding work of the inquiry teams has been shared with the school community and has put successful strategies in place to support student progress.
- Parents are enthusiastic about the quality of education that their children receive and are grateful for the support provided by all members of the staff.
- The administration, faculty, students and parents share high expectations for ongoing student achievement.
- The school is reflective, seeking to continually develop plans for future improvements with achievement of students as the focus.

Areas for improvement

- Continue to develop the goal setting process in all core subjects so that goals are based on evidence of prior learning and articulate next steps within given time frames.
- Expand the use of rubrics across curriculum areas to broaden support for students when setting and monitoring specific goals for reaching their learning targets.
- Formalize the process of supporting pedagogical growth by developing long and short term goals with teachers.
- Ensure that the differentiation of instruction and learning activities provides appropriate challenge for all students in all classes and subject areas.

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.

The faculty has embraced and embedded the use of data to support student achievement. Extension of the practices previously in place have deepened, resulting in teachers' increased ability to use information from their well organized data binders to identify strengths and weaknesses. Staff work together to align the assessments in all core subject areas, which occur at the end of each instructional unit of study and five times a year in literacy. This assists the school in monitoring trends and patterns throughout the year and in providing support for individual student achievement. In addition, qualitative data predominantly from frequent conferencing with students is included. These conferences provide the opportunity for students to "Convince Me" that they understand and can apply the skills learned. Focused grade meetings occur several times a week. Often, discussions among teachers identify trends and practices to move students forward. This has resulted in more direct and skill-based support. The specific needs of English language learners are identified using the NYSESLAT. After school programs three days a week support their learning and they make good progress.

The principal's concentrated commitment to the deepening analysis of data extends the quest for knowledge for teachers. Her passion for literacy and learning "constantly challenges everyone to continue learning, not only about data, but to come together and build understanding at all levels." To this end, all staff members are now engaged in deep reflections related to the application of data to instruction and the impact of their pedagogical practices. As a result, students are now beginning to articulate what they can do, how well they do it, and are being supported in articulating what they need to do to be successful with most assignments. Teachers regularly engage in grade and team meetings to discuss best practices.

Parents appreciate their opportunities for daily conversations with teachers, often at the beginning or end of the school day, and express confidence with the level of personal attention each student receives from staff members. Teachers use a variety of communication systems to inform parents and families of school events. Emails and phone messages are returned promptly. However, parents report that they are only rarely informed of or involved in communications related to the specific learning needs of their children. The principal is aware of the need to develop increased opportunities to engage in reciprocal communications with families so that students can be better supported at home.

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's Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) is a live, ongoing document where data from past performance and a needs assessment, conducted early in the school

year, informs goals. Members from the wider school community collaboratively generate the CEP. The core members of the school leadership team recently updated the goals, recognizing their movement towards achieving their plans for school-wide progress. One core component for this progress is the engagement by every teacher in action research projects to identify strategies to better support their students. This goal has been successfully attained, with each teacher now beginning his/her third round of action research this year.

Goals developed by staff across all subject areas are updated three to five times a year in order to sustain the good achievements in the major subject areas, where over 90% of the student population meets or exceeds grade level expectations yearly. Students draft personal goals for their own learning in reading, writing, math, science and social studies. However, there is no alignment between the two types of goals in subjects other than English language arts and mathematics, nor are timeframes for reaching these goals apparent. Instruction in English language arts is differentiated, based on the individual reading levels of students but the assignments that are connected to the small skill-based reading groups are not yet modified to address targeted skill-deficit areas. Therefore, the specific needs of all students are not being consistently addressed.

At present, formal procedures for engaging teachers in setting interim- and long-term goals to improve their practice is not consistent or embedded across the school. Therefore, professional growth is not actively monitored by administration to determine progress. The introduction of the Professional Teaching Standards as a measure of pedagogical practice is underway, and the administration has begun the process of modifying goal setting so that administration, staff and students' goals are specific, measurable, attainable and rigorous and will be assessed for attainment within specific time frames.

The Francis Lewis School is "sincere in the care that they give my child," stated one parent when asked about the quality of education the school provides. Students and families show interest and engagement in learning, as evidenced by the voluntary attendance at early morning tutoring by a large number of students, and the participation of parents in school activities.

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 well developed.

The school embraces and enhances strong programs in reading, writing, and mathematics. The science and social studies curricula are aligned with New York City and State standards. The principals' "passion for literacy goes across the board here," reports one teacher. Project based instruction that is aligned with State standards embeds the arts in daily instruction. Partnerships with artists in residency provide additional experiences in puppetry and percussion for early grades that challenge and enrich learning. Built in assessment components monitor student progress and assure that practices are adapted for continued improvement. The administration meets with their grade teams at least monthly to keep a check on individual and whole-class performance, reviewing the grade-wide measures developed to assess deficient skills across the grade. This leads to the evaluation of overall school progress which then guides organizational decisions. New instructional focuses have led to the design of reading curriculum maps and plans in all grades, detailed units of study in social studies

and more “hands-on” experiences that include the use of scientific exploration using Smartboards. The depth and rigor of these programs is leading a focus on creating “self-directed independent learners.” Parents report that the work for the students in some classes is more intense than in other classes, where there are clear objectives but insufficient rigor; however student engagement remains strong and focused on achievement. Differentiation of instruction is strongest in collaborative team teaching classes, where IEP goals drive instruction for a large number of the students, and additional supports are part of routine instruction.

The very stable staff continue to demonstrate strong levels of mutual trust and respect. They seek out opportunities, other than those provided, to collaborate on issues related to assessment and instruction. This is evident in the cross grade level meetings that assess competencies at one grade to assure progress in the following grade. The systems and structures in place ensure that the school is welcoming, orderly and calm. This promotes respect for all members of the family-like community. “Transitions are not easy” remarked one parent when discussing the change in the school under the new principal. “She is good at listening, and there is lots of conversation.” The staff agrees. This has resulted in the dedication of all members of the school community to “moving what is working to the next place” in order to benefit 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.

Inquiry team work last year resulted in the application of the strategy of *visualization* in response to the need for students to recall details and build comprehension. This is now an integral component of instruction in all subject areas. Data collection and analysis has been the priority this year. “I always loved teaching and learning with children. Now, I am completely enjoying teaching and learning with adults” stated the principal, when she discusses the in depth focus on action research that has emerged this year. This has led to increased professional development at school level, conducted by staff members. Data specialists on each grade have driven most of this work, and are assisting new staff in learning how to manipulate and use the information collected. Teachers welcome opportunities to learn together, and currently are engaging in focused study groups where professional literature such as *Understanding by Design* by Wiggins and McTighe are used to assist them in planning for and driving instruction. Collaborations with Teacher’s College provide the staff with workshops to support the expanding focus on literacy instruction. This has resulted in the alignment of instruction across each grade.

School leaders conduct walkthroughs that are grounded within the professional teaching standards of engaging students in learning and assessing learning. Administrators have not yet fully implemented the use of this process to monitor teaching effectively, or to support teachers in setting personal goals to improve their practice. There is little evidence of differentiated professional development and there is no strategic system in place by which administrators and teachers can evaluate their practice other than by their own reflections. The absence of data driven professional development plans for teachers is observable in that there are significant differences in the depth and breadth of professional learning goals. Teachers however report that the establishment of “lots of committees both at and across grade levels” has made them more responsible and accountable for both students and their own learning.

The school's newly created child study team encourages staff to refer students for possible intervention or services as soon as issues arise. The referral process requires the attachment of the prior interventions attempted, as well as a detailed history of the student's past school history. This enables the team, along with school personnel and families to provide intensive supports for students at the earliest possible point in order to address their needs.

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 well developed.

The principal has a clear short-term and long-term vision for the development and improvement of the school and is working tirelessly to implement her ideas. Many of her goals for this year are already met and have been revised higher for the end-of-year. The principal acknowledges that there is always work to be done and supports her staff in identifying additional systems and structures to support student achievement. The school is very self reflective and evaluates its practices on a consistent basis. Team meetings plan across grade levels, and work is under way to address the vertical evaluation and planning of required skills at each grade level in order to promote success in subsequent grades. The faculty is currently working on an *Essential Questions* curriculum in social studies that includes focus questions, teaching points and assessments. The principal's mantra of "Amplify, don't simplify" is the basis for all strategic plans to move forward. This is exemplified by teachers writing enriched curricula in all core subject areas that will exceed State standards. The staff voice consistent beliefs that every student will make at least one and a half years progress each year, and data from formative assessments demonstrate that they are well on their way to achieving this goal. Ever respectful of the great work her staff has already accomplished in the learning and application of data, the principal acknowledges that data analysis will always be a work in progress. The school has become very self reflective of its practices and actively evaluates its progress.

Efforts at moving the school forward are evident when all students, teachers and parents can understand that progress is not fixed. While each student receives consistent support in his/her efforts to succeed in the form of conferencing with their teachers, the lack of precise rubrics to assist students in monitoring their progress towards the successful completion of assignments counteracts the rigorous expectation of achieving maximum outcomes for all students' success.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The Francis Lewis School	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>				
	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>				
	Δ	➤	✓	+
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, DYO, 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