

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

Pathways College Preparatory School

Middle and High School 259

**109 – 89 204 Street
Queens
NY 11412**

Principal: Michele Shannon

Dates of review: December 10 - 11, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Mick Megee

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Pathways College Preparatory School is a middle and high school with 529 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 93% Black, 3% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 89.9%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Everyone works together well in this fast improving small school. The principal successfully provides faculty and students with opportunities to develop their own independent ways of working and to find their own solutions when they encounter difficulties and problems. This motivates all stakeholders to work energetically together for the common good and to make rapid progress.

The school is continuing to develop its capacity to collect, utilize and evaluate useful information on the performance and progress of students, although not all content areas are yet fully covered. The school, through its inquiry team, is beginning to analyze the performance of a few student subgroups, although it does not yet fully evaluate the performance of all the subgroups in each content area.

The small school setting means that everyone knows everyone else and so can quickly come to terms with any individual differences. This leads to a tolerant and accepting community where there is little conflict or disruption. Staff provide good role models for the students and continually demonstrate their confidence in and respect for one another. Students follow this lead and are almost always courteous, good humored and polite to each other as well as to staff.

The school effectively keeps families in touch with how well their children are doing in both their personal and academic lives. The principal demonstrates clearly to parents the importance of having them fully engaged in the life of the school through, for example, web-based grade books and the growing parent-teacher association.

The principal and administrators work hard to support the faculty by skilful lesson observations and good professional development. Teachers are responding well, although there is a recognized need for further work in improving differentiation and the setting of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-specific (SMART) goals. At present, some teachers give students lesson activities or deploy strategies that are too difficult for some, or not challenging enough for others. Where goal setting is not so strong, it is difficult for the administrators, faculty or students to measure whether their strategies are the right ones or whether they have been entirely successful in achieving their targets.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal, by effectively distributing her leadership, successfully ensures that the whole school community is committed to her core values and mission that all students will achieve the best they can.
- In this small-school setting, staff at all levels work very well together and provide the students with very good role models of cooperation and teamwork.
- Staff and students respect and trust one another so that relationships and behavior in lessons and around school are nearly always positive.
- Administrators, faculty and support staff enjoy a great partnership with parents who feel fully informed and included in their children's school life.
- Administrators make sure that faculty and students have many opportunities to reflect on their performance and identify their own ways in which to improve.
- Administrators provide good support to teachers by accurately assessing their teaching and by putting in place a good range of professional development to meet their needs.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all teachers match instructional activities and strategies to the different needs and achievement levels in the class.
- Make more effective use of data about the progress and performance of the different student subgroups in the school to ensure that no group of students is left behind.
- Ensure that goals set for students and teachers contain measurable criteria based on prior performance so that the school can easily evaluate success.
- Ensure that the good work already begun in data collection, utilization and evaluation is extended across all the content 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 staff collect a good range of information about individual students in a number of core subject areas, including English language arts, math and science. Teachers are beginning to make effective use of this information by paying closer attention to students who are doing less well than expected and by introducing effective remedial strategies. In other content areas, such as the arts and physical education, teachers have only recently begun to collect data so that teachers do not yet have complete background information when planning instruction.

This year, the school has introduced good procedures that give students the opportunity to assess their own performance each marking period over a number of different content areas. Students, alongside their teachers, then identify their preferred strategies for self-improvement and the students document this information in their individual "roadmaps". Students welcome the roadmaps and feel empowered by having more independence and control over their own learning. Teachers also welcome the roadmaps because they give them good insight into what strategies are likely to be the most productive.

The school analyzes its data in increasingly intensive ways by looking for patterns of underachievement or high achievement across grades and content areas. However, the school is not yet fully utilizing all the information that it has about the performance and progress of all the various student subgroups in the school. This means that it cannot be sure whether, for example, Hispanic students are underachieving when compared with any other ethnic group.

The school effectively supports the progress of English language learners and special education students by deploying very skilful specialist staff in the classroom. These staff ensure that the students are given work that challenges them without overwhelming them. This successful approach enables them to make rapid progress.

There is a strong working partnership between families and the school. The school has worked hard to increase the participation of parents through the well-supported parent-teacher association and by identifying a single, easy point of contact through the advisory system. The school also offers parents the opportunity to access their children's web-based grade books from home through a program called TeacherEase. Through this program, parents obtain up-to-date information about their children's studies, communicate with teachers, and motivate students to higher performance. Parents speak highly of these arrangements and say, "It's wonderful to know that you have complete information at your fingertips, day and night."

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.

While the school’s planning often contains effective and challenging goals, goal setting is not yet consistently effective at all levels. Every teacher in the school is an advisor for a small group of students. Each week, students sit down individually with their advisors to discuss their current progress toward reaching the goals set out in their roadmaps. The roadmaps are a real asset for teachers and students and contain a lot of very useful information. However, they do not yet all contain very specific short-term goals. Consequently, many students when asked are hard-pressed to say what they need to do over the next few weeks to make progress in a particular subject. This means that both they and their parents do not have a clear idea of what they need to practice or learn, and whether they have been successful.

Staff work very well together throughout the school. They set a wonderful example for the students in how to work as a team for the common good. Up until recently, staff most frequently collaborated through meetings with colleagues teaching the same grade. The recent introduction of vertical teams has enhanced teamwork across the whole school. At the same time, it has added an additional layer of accountability as well as effectively promoting more rapid curriculum development. Through their collaborations in grades and vertical teams, staff set goals for improvement and the administrators effectively align these goals to those set in the school Comprehensive Educational Plan. Many of the goals set are SMART. However, many goals are not securely based on trend information from the past, and some do not have specific criteria by which success can be easily measured.

The school has high expectations of what students can achieve with a clear focus on preparing everyone for a good college education. Displays in the hallways reflect the high aspirations and achievement of the school community. As a result, students have high expectations of themselves for achieving the highest possible grades in preparation for the professional career of their choice. Parents show how they share these expectations by their positive responses in last year’s Learning Environment Survey, and by their demands for a wider curriculum and even better resources.

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.

In some classes, there are examples of very good practice in differentiation. In these classes, teachers make sure that all students have precisely the right level of work to meet their individual needs as well as a range of different strategies to meet their individual styles of learning. However, many teachers in the school have not yet achieved such mastery in this area. High-performing students, for example, sometimes miss out when given work that they find easy, finish quickly and have to wait for others to catch up. In response to the need to provide further challenge to high achievers, the school has introduced advanced placement classes in grade 12, and high-achieving students can take Regents exams early in grade 8. Parents justifiably would like to see advanced placement classes available in grade 11. The school recognizes that many teachers still have some way to go in differentiating their instruction and has instituted a

focus on this, as well as on assessment for learning, this year. This drive includes good professional development from external advisers.

The administrators work hard to wring the last drop of value out of the relatively small budget allocated to the school. They rightly make it a budget priority to bring in resources that target lower-performing students, for example allowing for more small-group teaching. The curriculum offers a reasonable range of activities in which students can achieve, although budget restrictions mean that it is not as broad as everyone would like. For example, opportunities to achieve in physical education are limited by the lack of specialist facilities, and there are few enrichment activities such as electives and clubs. The students would particularly like to do track and gym, and have their own football team. This would enable them to lead a healthier life as well as enhance their identity with the school.

The small class sizes within a small school, as well as the advisory groups, have led to the development of close personal relationships between all members of the community. Tolerance and respect flourish in this supportive conducive environment. There is only minor misbehavior and little disruption to lessons.

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 development is aligned with recommendations for improvement identified in regular observations. Teachers appreciate the support they receive from the administrators to help them improve their practice quickly. They find the lesson observations, intervisitations and suggestions for improvement helpful. As one teacher put it, there is "no negative vibe", and this results in an improved standard of instruction and classroom management. Teachers new to the school or new to the profession feel they receive particularly good encouragement, guidance and advice from their colleagues as well as from the administration.

Up until recently, there has not been a formal system for setting goals for professional learning, which means that it is difficult to judge how effective the professional support has been. To address this need, the principal has introduced an individual performance planning system. Each teacher assesses their own instructional skills against the Santa Cruz teaching standards, and then sits down with the principal to map out individual professional goals. These will eventually form the basis of a formal whole-school professional development plan. The new system has not completed a full first cycle, and formal goals are not yet in place for all teachers. Self-assessment has given teachers a renewed sense of freedom and ownership of their own professional development.

There are many good professional development opportunities available to teachers both in-house and through their partners, the College Board. In-house training comes effectively through the vertical and grade team meetings. The College Board provides the staff with a very good range of timely and relevant professional development activities, such as programs in differentiation and the use of advisories. The school has begun to increase the skills and understanding of the staff in data analysis, particularly in seeing how the different subgroups are doing in each content area. Not all teachers are yet fully conversant with the latest developments, such as how to use the ARIS system, but this is near the top of the principal's agenda for action.

There is a good range of support for students who are struggling. The school uses case conferences well to bring all concerned around the table to identify what has gone wrong and to put in place effective remedial strategies. The skilful guidance team, the pupil personnel team and the positive behavioral intervention and supports team work collaboratively with families and advisors to enhance the academic and personal growth of the students. There are very good specialist staff to assist those with additional instructional requirements such as English language learners and special education 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 administrative cabinet reviews the data it has on a quarterly basis. This allows it to identify quickly which individuals are doing less well than expected and to come up with remedial strategies to bring them back on track. As grade and vertical teams continue to develop their effectiveness, there is increasingly proficient monitoring and evaluation of performance in grades and content areas. There are still some remaining areas for development. Some of the content areas, such as the arts and physical education, do not yet have enough data available for effective monitoring to take place. Some goals are not written specifically enough so that the school can easily review them to judge success. Nevertheless, the principal has a good sense of how the school needs to improve. She has put in place a good set of procedures and structures, such as the inquiry team, staff retreats, and grade and vertical team conferences to monitor progress and evaluate improvement. There is not yet sufficient information to demonstrate the effectiveness of these structures.

The inquiry team is providing an effective lead in demonstrating to the staff the usefulness of data-based action research in promoting achievement for students who are struggling. More broadly, the school is showing in other ways that it has the flexibility to be able to adapt its plans in response to incoming data. For example, every content area faculty group is required to construct its own diagnostic to gain an understanding of what it needs to do to provide programs that are even more effective. The administrators use these audits well to identify where to target resources.

The principal is very effective in distributing leadership and empowering all stakeholders. Because of this, all constituents have a clear understanding of the school's mission and the principal's personal vision. Everyone is right behind her. When asked about the quality of leadership in the school, one member of the student government said, "We are all leaders." The principal is a facilitative leader and works quietly behind the scenes to promote the school's mission. Another student explained, "The principal's guiding hand is everywhere." By accurately identifying where improvements are necessary, she has brought about marked improvements since the last Quality Review. Under her leadership, everyone is justifiably proud of what the school has achieved and looks forward to even greater achievement in the future.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Pathways College Preparatory 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>	△	➤	✓	+
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
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