



**Department of  
Education**

*Joel I. Klein, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**City Island School**

**Elementary/Middle School 175**

**200 City Island Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10464**

**Principal: Amy Lipson**

**Dates of review: December 10 - 11, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Alvin Jeffs**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

City Island School is an elementary-middle school with 389 students from kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 8% Black, 27% Hispanic, 61% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 94.2%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The school is located on a small island in the Long Island Sound.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

This is a school situated within a community that has a strong sense of identity and the school is considered to be a very important aspect of local life. It has changed, and improved, dramatically since the principal arrived three years ago. This is because of the outstanding leadership provided by the principal. She inherited a school that had a formal and non-differentiated approach to teaching. Staff and parents attest that it was also a school where there were many tensions, within and among both staff and parent bodies. It is now a very different, positive school. After some initial hesitation, all staff are now committed to using data to plan lessons and adapt the content and process to each student. A long-serving member of staff sums up this change when she says, "It is the most exciting period of my teaching career." Parents are equally happy with the changes. Those parents involved with the running of the school have high expectations for their children. They say without reservation, "This is now a model school."

A major element in this renaissance in teaching is the total commitment of staff. This is evident in the way that data and consultation are used in most classes to set learning goals for each and every student. Throughout, from kindergarten to grade 8, students have clear goals for reading, writing and math. What is most impressive is the clarity with which students, including those as young as five, are able to understand and articulate their goals and apply them daily. At a strategic level, the developments and improvement in relationships and teaching have come about as the result of the clarity of the goals set by the principal in collaboration with all staff. This, coupled with the high level of data usage and analysis, has assisted teachers in understanding the individual needs of each student. In addition a thorough and high quality professional development program has assisted staff with different levels of experience to adopt and adapt their own use of data to understand and teach their students.

However, the staff recognizes that "We are not there yet." Learning goals are not yet fully established within science and social studies but are developing well. Additionally, support for the few teachers who need help in accepting and implementing the principles of differentiation and target-setting has not yet been completely successful. Although there are detailed conferences with teachers at the start of each year, these do not yet fully incorporate a discussion of the detailed expectations each teacher has for each class. Similarly, not all team meetings result in clearly timed programs with their subsequent quantified outcomes.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal provides very good leadership, setting the highest standards in strategic planning and self-evaluation.
- There are very good systems for analyzing a wide range of data and using the analysis to evaluate the progress of individual students and subgroups.
- The impressive commitment of staff means that the school is moving forward well with many new and appropriate initiatives.
- Students demonstrate a clear understanding of their learning goals and how to achieve them.
- The principal, coaches and consultants provide a high quality professional development program that assists all staff to receive the training they need and want.
- The school has maintained and developed very strong links with parents that ensure their full involvement in the school.

### What the school needs to improve

- Continue those aspects of classroom observation and professional development that seek to enlarge teachers' repertoire of skills in differentiation.
- Assist all teachers and departments to develop specific learning goals for individual students and groups.
- Devise ways in which the start-of-year discussions between teachers and cabinet members can include a rigorous discussion of whole-year goals for individual classes.
- Ensure that all plans have a structure that includes timeframes and benchmarks for interim evaluation.

## 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 well developed.**

Since the principal took up her post, there has been a significant increase in the data provided for and expected from schools. In response to each stage she has introduced systems that capture the relevant data and lead to action. The data includes everything from examination results to classroom observations, from the newly available ARIS data to samples of students' work. All of this information is collated and analyzed by the principal and the literacy and math coaches to provide a synthesis for each class teacher. It is also the means by which both trends and subgroups are analyzed. The previous Quality Review report recommended better attention to subgroups within the school. This is now a daily facet of the work of senior staff. It has allowed them, for example, to identify under-achievement in White students and to establish a correlation between attendance and achievement for a small group of students. The impact of such detailed analysis has been significant. During 2007-08, a considerable amount of work was carried out to support lower achieving students, particularly in aligning the work of special education staff with classroom teachers. This current year, the data review has led the school to move the focus of the inquiry team to look at under-achieving students who are working at Levels 3 and 4 in English language arts and math. At grade level, the data summaries have become the basis of detailed discussion between class teachers, coaches and external consultants.

The better understanding of students arising from this use of data is now employed as a powerful tool in discussions between teachers, students and parents. All staff now use regular one-on-one conferencing to establish learning goals with individual students. These targets are relayed to parents through frequent letters. These then become the basis of all parent-teacher discussions. Parents identify the impact of this by saying "Our children are now empowered; not talked at."

**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 speed with which the school has changed is largely attributable to the procedures modeled by the principal at a strategic level. This is particularly obvious in the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan. In order to set up strategic goals for the school, staff are consulted and data is collected. In this way the need to individualize learning goals has contributed significantly to strategic goals over the past three years, as has professional development on data analysis and focus on higher attaining students. Goals such as these are then made specific, with percentage

improvement rates and clear timeframes. A draft plan goes out for consultation with staff and parents. The parental role in the school leadership team is a robust and helpful one. Questions are asked, ideas challenged and more information sought. The goals themselves then become part of all discussions within the school from regular whole-faculty meetings to individual work between teachers and coaches in classrooms. Specific, but above all high, expectations underlie all discussions with parents and students. The setting of classroom goals in nearly all subjects by most teachers means that students become increasingly in charge of their own progress and accelerated development. Learning goals are not yet fully established within science and social studies. Charts within classrooms and the use of benchmarks, to indicate what work should look like at different stages, have all given students and their families a clear idea of where they are going and what they can do to move along faster.

Coaches and consultants reinforce the processes modeled by the principal so that timeframes and interim evaluation points are in place for many strategic processes, such as professional development programs or the introduction of SMARTboard technology. This is a school where collaboration is of the highest quality and much good practice arises from the close staff relationships within grade and subject department groups. However, it is not always the case that rigorous goals are set with teachers at the start of the year designed to give teachers a sharper focus on student learning needs. Similarly, the excellent grade and cross-grade team meetings do not always result in the setting of clearly timed and subsequent, quantified outcomes.

**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.**

A real strength of the school is in its imaginative and exciting curriculum. Students enjoy the “hands on” lab work in science, the wide range of activities within math and the rich program of visits they make to museums, galleries and local places of historical interest. They appreciate that, although the resources of the school are limited, there are high quality opportunities to take part in music, art and physical education. All core subjects are aligned with State standards, as have the in-class tests and rubrics by which students’ progress is assessed. The school has successfully devised different cultures and ways of working for early years, elementary and middle school students, as well as the development of subject specialists for grades 7 and 8. In particular, older students receive a curriculum that prepares them well for high school.

All curriculum developments are backed by thoughtful and practical resource support. Thus SMARTboards have backed up the growth of technology and extra books underpin the development of literature circles. The introduction of 80-minute lessons has been well received by staff and data indicates that it has contributed to significant student progress. The school has made a conscious decision that staffing receives the greatest financial boost. This has allowed the development of a very successful collaborative teaching class within kindergarten. It has also meant that the literacy coach is also the school data specialist. Above all, the school has raised the overall staffing level to allow greater freedom in developing common planning time, professional activity periods and study groups. This contributes significantly to the effective growth of classroom conferencing and goal setting. The strong culture of trust and respect between all participants within the school means that these resources increase the success of teacher meetings and make the task of differentiation easier in the smaller classes.

Differentiation has developed well and now permeates most lessons. The use of questions to challenge the full range of ability and the understanding that different students learn in different ways has meant that the individualization of teacher-student discussions has moved on dramatically. There are still some staff who have not yet realized the full potential of individual conferencing. This failure has had a negative impact, for example in inconsistent math assessment scores.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school's work is well developed.**

Without a large instructional cabinet, the school has been very reliant on expert coaches and an external consultant. They have developed excellent in-house training units that work, on a daily basis, modeling teaching techniques in the classroom. A professional development program is negotiated between the coaches and each individual member of staff at the start of the year. Out of these discussions come professional development goals that relate closely to the needs identified by each teacher. These, for example, include elements relating the school's strategic goals, differentiation and challenge to higher achievers. In addition, there are opportunities for teachers to pursue training that relates to their own personal development. This is increasingly supported by intervisitations with other staff to view and assess good practice. These developments mean that staff training has improved most teachers' ability to plan more precisely for each student.

The rigorous observations of staff, carried out by the principal and her colleagues, provide excellent opportunities for senior staff to assess the success of strategic initiatives and to discuss classroom management issues. This system works so well because all senior staff are respected as good practitioners with the students' needs at heart. Teachers say that their, "Ability to plan for each student has been immensely improved by watching a highly skilled practitioner at work in the classroom".

The inquiry team also provides another effective channel for professional development. Good work carried out by a small core team last year resulted in the dissemination of techniques relating to reciprocal teaching, a method by which readers gain more involvement in their own learning. The technique has developed well in many classes. This year more teachers are involved in the investigations, but with a strategic focus on higher attaining readers. Once again, the excellent collaboration and communication between staff means that new ideas are quickly absorbed within classrooms.

The school draws on a rich network of support outside the school. Parents are, without doubt, the strongest contributors. Talented parents are already providing courses on substance abuse and ecology, leading local history trips and funding and implementing the very varied program of Lincoln Center visits. Links with the Sports and Arts Program and Bronx Arts Ensemble enrich the arts curriculum, while the Brooklyn Attorneys 'STARS' program provides excellent curriculum input on drugs and violence. The impact of these partnerships is clear. They have added to the richness and individual relevance of arts programs within the school and provided considerable expertise in developing programs and goals relating to individual social maturity.

**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.**

Data is used exceptionally well to evaluate the effectiveness of all Comprehensive Educational Plan goals. Both are used on a weekly basis by the principal and at key points during the year. Thus, the progress of lower attaining students was monitored against all internal and some external data four times during 2007-08. The improvement in attainment levels was apparent. The same benchmarks have been set for 2008-09 for the attainment of Level 3 and 4 students in danger of not progressing and falling back. Periodic reviews have also indicated to the school that recent financial reductions mean that the consultant coach will cease working with the school. It is this responsiveness, based on careful data analysis, that has seen the work of the inquiry team and the goals with the Comprehensive Educational Plan alter to focus on higher order language skills. The regular teacher observations are also means by which senior staff identify and address mid-year difficulties that individual staff might be experiencing.

Clear timeframes and regular interim evaluation points have typified the strategic work of this principal. It is an aspect of the rigor and clarity of purpose that underlie her accurate and professional evaluation of the school. It is now very much part of the best classroom practice. Within English language arts and math there are clear annual plans, long-term and short-term goals for key matters, such as the development of rubrics and the evaluation of assessment results. These are now rapidly developing within social studies and science, where the 'scope and sequence' documentation is allowing the school to formalize the year's work and set benchmark assessment points within the year. There is a range of practice within classrooms. The best has incorporated the concept and practice of identifying short-, medium- and long-term goals for classes and individual students. The school has yet to ensure that every teacher has this degree of precision, but both professional development and regular one-on-one discussions with the principal are assisting those teachers still working on improving their practice.

The past and present success of the school is that staff, "All see ourselves as learners". This reflective practice has transferred rapidly from the principal, to staff and thence to students. It has not yet had its full impact on student achievement and one or two staff have more to learn than others. However, the regularity with which outcomes are analyzed together with the very focused professional development program and the high level of staff commitment indicate that the clear and appropriate route already mapped out for its success will be followed.

## School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: City Island School</b>	△	➤	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?				<b>X</b>
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?				<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>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.</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?				<b>X</b>
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

### DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYQ, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

<b>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.</b>							
<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			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				<b>X</b>			
<b>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.</b>							
<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			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				<b>X</b>			
<b>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.</b>							
<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			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	▷	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>