

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Theatre Arts Production Company

Middle – High School 225

**2225 Webster Avenue
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Lynn Passarella

Dates of review: December 1 - 2, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Richard Woolf

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Theatre Arts Production Company is a middle-high school with 503 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 24% Black, 69% Hispanic, 3% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 38% of the students enrolled and girls account for 62%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 94%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 68% eligibility.

The school shares the building with another school. Currently the facilities have not increased in terms of space as the school has grown from a 6-8 middle school to a 6-12 school.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

This school has grown in its reputation as an effective and engaging middle school. As a result of its success, the school took the decision to expand to a grade 6-12 school and will have its first high school graduation in 2009. It is pleasing to report that over ninety-five percent of seniors will graduate to colleges or work placements of their choice. The downside of this success is that in the middle school student progress over the last year took a downturn.

The principal's leadership is a major contributing factor to the improvement of the middle school. Already there are clear signs of progress that the middle school is improving because of her taking dramatic action in terms of hiring and dismissal of staff. Likewise, a complete overhaul of data and its analysis are leading to changes in writing and grading policy that are having a positive impact upon student learning. The school community acknowledges her passion to rectify the current middle school dilemma and whole-heartedly backs her. The school is setting measurable goals with interim checkpoints for staff and students that are helping teachers improve instruction. However, there is still too much inconsistency in instruction, especially in terms of differentiated teaching. This often results in the highest-achieving students not having challenges commensurate to their performance level. An exceptional arts program engages and enthuses all students, and acts as a stimulus for their learning. The school has a very good professional development program in place and systems to monitor and support new teachers. The focus is to individualize programs for teachers and the results of this are proving positive. However, the school does not yet disseminate the good instructional practice of many teachers across the entire school.

The school is recovering from its middle school slide. There are now many positive initiatives in place. These initiatives are the stimulus for recovery, and consequently the school has to ensure its monitoring procedures are robust enough to meet the challenge. The school has support of its parents although it still has yet to engage them in greater numbers in supporting the learning needs of their children. Students can learn and develop skills to meet the challenges facing them in the years ahead in this safe, welcoming and caring environment. The school is confident that the procedures now in place are robust enough for them to regain their reputation as a high-achieving school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's leadership is challenging the school community to raise its aspirations in all areas of its work, but particularly in the middle school.
- The school's ability to collect and analyze data at an individual student and cohort level across all subject areas is a strengthening feature of its work.
- The process of goal setting greatly helps teachers focus on issues of teaching and learning.
- The school has a good system of identifying teacher professional development that continues to assist teachers in developing student learning.
- The school's art program is first class and acts as stimulus for student achievement in other subject areas.
- Students have high rates of attendance, as they are able to learn in a safe, secure environment where staff and students are mutually respectful of each other.

What the school needs to improve

- Monitor even more closely, the range of new initiatives to tackle student progress to identify those that are proving effective.
- Refine instructional practices so that lessons are rigorous, differentiated and meet the needs of all students, especially those that are higher achieving.
- Engage parents more fully in the school and, in particular, in the learning process of their children.
- Encourage teachers' best practice to be shared openly across the whole staff.

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 school is adept in using data to inform many aspects of school life. This expertise arrives from a principal and a senior team that constantly analyzes and synthesizes the school's data. Such analysis alerted the school to the likelihood of poor outcomes in middle school results for the last academic year. It also gave the principal time to make changes, that although were considered dramatic at the time, now mean that middle school teaching is more effective. Consequently, student learning is improving. This close analysis highlighted the necessity to improve writing across all grade levels and there is now a school-wide writing program in place. Early data indications show this approach is proving beneficial across the entire curriculum in improving student skills, with predictive assessments showing higher levels of achievement.

Meeting the needs of the special education students and English language learners is a strong feature of the school. Both groups perform well in external examinations, contributing to the school gaining additional credits on its Progress Report card. Early indications from the high school show these groups gaining significantly in all subjects. The school also understands the needs of its ethnic and gender groups and the performance of such groups. The school made a number of changes resulting from this information. The most important of these changes was the establishment of homogeneous skills groups in each grade level. Consequently, students are showing improvement on assessments like Acuity, which the school is using with particular effect in the middle school. The principal is able to show data projections for all students as the school grows into a middle-high school. This is a strength, as it allows her to plan for the future. The school communicates a great deal of data to parents that relates to the children's learning. Much of the academic data is available to the parents online and over 30% of them access this on a regular basis to check progress. The school welcomes this as being positive, but hopes to extend the uptake over the coming months.

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.

There is a very strong system of goal setting in operation. It ensures not only the setting of challenging and realistic whole-school goals, but also teacher and individual student goals. There is now actuality rather than an assumption that no student will drop from the previous year's achievement. Resulting from this is an expectation that all students will make progress against his or her individual prior achievement within each subject area. The principal sets teacher goals through conferencing with them and they have specific measurable outcomes. This system has taken on a greater significance since

the last Progress Report that highlighted a lack of student progress in the middle school. Early indications show this approach, aligning with the new whole-school writing and grading policy has already caused student progress to be significantly higher across all grade levels. The administration is now very proactive in checking progress on a minimum monthly basis for every subject in the curriculum. The school's Comprehensive Educational Plan clearly demonstrates the importance of setting challenging goals for whole-school improvement. The work of the Inquiry Team assists in helping teachers deliver targeted instruction. The school now has a number of teams that are building on the experiences of previous work. However, the teams are still to ensure that all staff members are aware of their work, especially as it relates to the operations of the middle school.

There are defined moments in the semester when checking and readjustment of goals by administration and teachers takes place. This enables teachers to re-focus student goals and, where necessary, readjust individual goals to enhance further learning. In this timely way, parents and students have updated information of progress. The school has the facility for students and parents to access online grade information. Parents acknowledge this as being a very effective tool in helping them assist their children. However, the school is not monitoring the success of this venture in terms of it being a positive way of engaging more parents in the learning process. Neither does the school have parent courses to teach them how best to assist their children to study at home.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school follows the mandated curriculum, but adjusts it when there is clear evidence for the need to change in a particular subject or across a grade level. For example, the inception of the whole-school writing rubric came from the analysis of previous external examinations that alerted staff to a potential weakness in the students' academic profile. The school has an exceptional arts program that befits its name. Every student follows a general arts program on entry that exposes him or her to a wide range of visual and performing arts. As students progress through the school, they have the opportunity to major in one specific area, which they study in greater depth. The students' experiences in this area of the school's work are excellent and are ones they take with them for the rest of their lives. Teaching with and through the medium of the arts is a strong motivational feature for the students to engage in the learning process.

Despite teachers working very hard, there are still too many students who do not reach their full potential, due to the lack of appropriate differentiated teaching. At an individual teacher level and within certain subject areas the lack of challenge is apparent. The administration is working hard to alter this, and because of new initiatives, improvement is taking place. The school uses its resources to good effect and teachers have appropriate equipment and materials to undertake their work. However, space continues to be a limiting factor for the school, especially as there are no extra rooms available, despite the expansion of the school over the last four years

This is an exceptionally vibrant school and one where students want to participate fully. It is a safe and secure environment for young people to learn and grow. The atmosphere is one of warmth and friendliness. The school is providing a haven for students and as one student said, "This is my second home and at times even my first.

Everyone is so caring and helpful.” This is a major reason why the school’s attendance rate is as high as 94 percent. Currently, over 75 percent of high school students began their schooling as sixth graders, which is acclamation of how they feel about their school and its importance to their learning.

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 administration has put in place systems to allow each teacher to access a wide range of professional development opportunities. Teachers have their own plans for professional development and these emerge from conferencing with the principal as part of the goal-setting procedure. Checking for further development comes through the structure of regular formal and informal lesson observations. Teachers receive feedback, which they value as being helpful in improving their instruction. All new teachers have access to a mentor. This proves an invaluable measure in the settling-in phase of their career. Many new teachers comment how the transition to full-time teaching has been easier due to support of colleagues. There are a number of opportunities for staff to meet and work collaboratively. This ensures that in both grade level and subject team meetings a commonality of approach for the delivery of higher quality instruction is developing. The school feels re-focusing on instruction in the middle school is currently of paramount importance.

The Inquiry Team is expanding its terms of reference with three teams, and some staff members have an active role within that structure. However, the teams still do not share all their findings with the whole staff on a regular basis. This is part of the same situation where the school fails to formally identify and share with the entire staff the very good practice that appears in pockets of its work.

The school has a number of external organizations that assist it in developing the whole student. They have a strong affiliation with the Children’s Aid Society. This is not only helping the young people, but their families. Parents comment on how this linkage is strong and exceptionally supportive, especially in preparing them to face the fact their child may well be college bound. Another impetus to support the students in achieving their goals is the Early College program. The school has 68 students enrolled in the program and the link to Lehman College is a motivational factor for the students to realize their ambitions.

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 administration has a clear overview of the progress all students are making. This results from a number of initiatives that are now in place because of the last progress report. The strategy to improve writing across the curriculum is a good example. However, the school has yet to put in place rigorous monitoring systems to show that this initiative, and others to improve student learning and outcomes, is the most effective. The principal meets with her staff at the commencement of the year to set goals. The principal undertakes reviews of the goals before the end of the first semester

Teachers show the principal evidence of work to exemplify how they are meeting or exceeding the set goals. This is proving an effective way of challenging teachers, as at these review meetings discussion of new goals takes place. With the overall monitoring of the teachers and students the school is able to make necessary changes that are continuing to move the school forward in pursuit of its overall school goals.

The principal reflects on data that comes from outside sources. The cabinet meets weekly, not only to ensure the school is viable from an internal perspective, but also to analyze reports written about the school. Consequently, a number of areas for improvement from the last Quality Review are now in operation. The last Progress Report came as a huge shock in terms of the middle school's low scores. However, the school's response is proactive and the number of new initiatives positive. There is a strong belief throughout the school that it provides students with challenge and an expectation that they can achieve and become college students. The school now has in place the systems to make the dream of college graduation a reality. Together the entire community is striving to make it work.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Theatre Arts Production Company	△	➤	✓	+
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, 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