



**Department of  
Education**

*Joel I. Klein, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy**

**Early Childhood School 236**

**499 East 176 Street**

**Bronx**

**NY 10457**

**Principal: Beverly Ellis**

**Dates of review: November 12 - 14, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Corinne Brown**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy is an early childhood school with 389 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 2. The school population comprises 1% American Indian, 32% Black, 65% Hispanic, 1% Asian and 1% White students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 91.0%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 87% eligibility.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.**

This small, nurturing school knows its community well and places students at the heart of all it does. As one student said, "They love you. They care for you." Administration addresses the considerable challenge of location on two sites at a distance from each other with positive determination. Many students travel by bus so some parents find it difficult to travel to their child's school, but parents praise the school's effective communication about their children's progress.

Leaders and staff are reflective and seek to improve the quality of education provided for students. They responded quickly to the recommendations from the previous Quality Review and made good progress with these issues. They know that some areas are still developing. The school collects much relevant data and has developed its own database. However, in these aspects, the school's work has not gone far enough as its synthesis and analysis is primarily in English language arts and math. It has begun to refine its systems and procedures further to reflect requirements for all content areas with added precision in goal setting, and this work continues. Parents and staff establish school priorities and formulate action plans, based on data to inform organizational change. They communicate regularly about students' achievement and next learning steps. This information is not robustly matched by precise goal setting for individuals and groups in all areas. Staff work collaboratively and provide positive role models for students and work hard to accommodate the varied needs within their classes, but lessons do not consistently offer sufficient challenge to all students. Differentiation is not consistent across all content areas and classes. Administration rightly prioritizes staff professional development, however, the processes for determining needs using observations of instruction, formulating individual teacher growth plans and evaluating impact are not sufficiently robust.

The school community and the environment encourage good attendance, suitable behavior and high expectations for learning. Students benefit from a rich curriculum and families benefit from helpful support systems. Trust, respect and the development of social and emotional skills underpin the school's work. The community has a shared focus on the individual child, enhancing their experiences and promoting academic growth, social cohesion and responsibility. The school has come a long way in its use of data to plan for future growth and is ready to add the necessary precision to its processes to accelerate change.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Parents have valuable opportunities to be involved in their child's learning through regular and open communication with teachers about progress.
- There is a highly supportive environment where parents share the school's high expectations for attendance, learning and behavior clearly with parents.
- Staff collaborate well, assist each other professionally and are positive role models for students, who feel safe, cared for and want to learn.
- The school's systems and partnerships support students and their families in continual learning and promote students' personal growth and development.
- The school is reflective, seeking to continually develop, and uses data to plan realistically for future improvements with students as the focus.

### What the school needs to improve

- Extend the analysis of assessment data in all content areas to inform goal setting at all levels.
- Include measurable outcomes and interim checkpoints in all goals across the school to monitor progress and growth.
- Ensure that lessons and content areas are suitably differentiated to challenge all students, particularly higher achievers, and extend their learning.
- Refine lesson observation procedures to formalize individual teacher professional growth plans and maximize student learning.
- In strategic decision-making, evaluate progress toward defined goals and make associated changes through regular, formalized interim checks against measurable targets.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.**

**This area of the school's work is underdeveloped with proficient features.**

The school has developed effective systems of gathering both formative and summative data, which it uses to inform both instruction and curriculum decision-making. It networks closely with other schools to compare useful information in seeking to improve and is piloting a data management tool. Consistently maintained assessment binders for literacy and math, with protocols for their use, ensure teachers administer standardized assessments rigorously. The school is beginning to assess in other core areas such as science and social studies, but has not yet synthesized or analyzed information to inform modifications or changes in these subjects. Overall, data management is not as extensive as it needs to be. Recently, the school devised report cards and interim reports to give parents and students feedback on achievement and next learning steps. These provide useful information at least five times a year, including reference to social studies and science, although they have not been evaluated for their impact on achievement. Teachers communicate with parents frequently, both formally and informally, to share information about students' prior learning, habits and needs, through surveys and personal contact. Procedures to secure high levels of attendance are robust as immediate letters and calls follow student absence. Bus issues adversely affect the amount of learning time for many, particularly special education students, but this is outside the school's control.

The school has devised its own database to aid analysis of some information, particularly for subgroups in literacy. Along with its effective inquiry team research, it identified the need to restructure the organization of English language learners, special education students and kindergarten instruction. Already there are positive results from the resulting English as a second language classes, collaborative team teaching classes and the change to center-based kindergarten learning, although it is too soon to evaluate thoroughly. Although leaders and staff have a detailed informal knowledge of its student population, they realize it is important to use data more specifically to inform groupings and instruction. The performance of a growing group of Black students, who have arrived from Africa, has not been analyzed discretely.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.**

**This area of the school's work is underdeveloped with proficient features.**

Teachers collaborate well, particularly in grades within each building, to devise specific goals for literacy and math based on data, including student work. Goals in science and social studies are less precise. Teachers work hard to address individual education plans and other goals within the classroom, supported by coaches, specialist teachers

and external providers. Grade goals are standards based, but most goal setting across the school lacks the measurable outcomes and formalized regular interim checkpoints to monitor progress and growth carefully. Leaders and faculty re-visit goals at the end of each marking period, which informs planning and differentiation, but this process does not yet provide sufficiently precise goals for all students or subjects. The school works transparently and regularly with parents and the school leadership team to formulate and evaluate clear whole-school goals based on data. The principal's performance review relevantly details this plan, as the school is currently devising its Comprehensive Educational Plan.

Teachers meet formally with parents at regular intervals to discuss their children's progress and ways the family can help them achieve their goals. They make every effort to involve parents in this learning partnership and open communication is effective, particularly about literacy and math. The dual-sited school serves a diverse community with several languages, so the parent coordinator is pivotal in facilitating a good exchange of information and advocating for both home and school. As one parent said of the school, "It goes above and beyond in communication." Within the welcoming and supportive environment, valuable systems enable parents to support the school's high expectations of attendance, learning and behavior. "Holdover" action plans and student support team "at risk" plans provide beneficial, monitored steps that are having positive results. Students aspire to age-related goals they set themselves, but these are generally broad, as in-depth conferencing across subject areas has not been fully developed.

**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.**

Leaders and faculty rightly place a high value on providing a broad, standards-based curriculum, including the "Blueprint for the Arts," to promote students' academic, social and emotional growth. Accordingly, cluster teachers deliver subjects such as art and science in both buildings. The social studies thematic curriculum, for example, is comprehensive in preparing students for transfer to their next school and fostering social and personal responsibility. Teachers cater effectively for English language learners and special education students in their planning, especially in the collaborative team teaching setting. However, there is no robust system of assessment to ensure that all core subjects meet all students' identified needs. Students enjoy opportunities such as chorus to perform in public. Teachers differentiate broadly through center activities, varied tasks and multi-modality instruction. While students are generally engaged, lessons do not consistently challenge students and extend their learning, particularly the higher achievers.

Resourcing supports the broad curriculum and the "Teddy Bear Curriculum," part of the responsive classroom, enhances students' emotional literacy and social skill development. Teachers and staff flexibly adapt the limited available space to good effect, collaborating well within the open plan situation. Classrooms offer vibrant, organized and safe learning environments for students, with a calm tone emanating from all staff. Adults in school are positive role models for students, with male staff valued for enhancing the early childhood experience as father figures. The high levels of mutual trust and respect between the principal, staff, parents and students are reflected in the

particularly positive response rate in the Learning Environment Survey. Parents are particularly appreciative of the secure, caring environment that nurtures their children. One parent spoke for many in saying, "We'll be sad when our students leave."

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

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The principal and assistant principal know the staff well in both buildings and foster cohesion through shared procedures, meetings and ongoing communication. Professional development overall aligns with the school's goals. Highly visible within classrooms on a daily basis, the administration responds positively to student needs and teacher identified requests for development, such as the collaborative team teachers request to develop their skills in supporting students on the autistic spectrum. Equally, leaders are exploring more effective ways to "turnkey" information to all staff at both sites, such as through video conferencing. Coaches and an external consultant provide sound in-class support for teachers and students, modeling lessons as required. Lessons observations and walkthroughs are frequent but lack formalization of teacher professional growth plans rooted in a robust lesson observation process. The school records professional development on its matrix, but does not rigorously evaluate its impact on student outcomes.

Teachers are reflective and improve their practices through open access to administration and frequent conversations about professional practices. They participate in inquiry teams, follow projects to increase their own learning and visit each other's classrooms to share good practice. Grade collaboration is regular and effective, with weekly common planning and student work as a focus. Other professional dialogue is ongoing and frequent through informal contact, including with paraprofessionals and cluster teachers. Collaborative team teachers take part in professional development twice a month on Saturdays. This is anecdotally beneficial and demonstrates the commitment of these staff and the school to support them and their students.

The school supports families successfully through its open access, regular feedback about student progress. When required, all parties involved meet to plan detailed action to effect the necessary change. The school's social worker and parent coordinator facilitate student personal growth effectively across both sites. In addition, partnerships with organizations such as Bank Street College, Bronx Arts and Randall's Island soccer program directly benefit students. The school also encourages families to be learners through library activities and teacher-devised projects, such as personal journals.

**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.**

Within the classrooms, teachers routinely and carefully assess students' mastery of skills and concepts in literacy and math, using formative and summative methods. Teachers have class and individual goals for students, but these are not consistently specific or measurable. Cluster teachers assess student progress against grade levels. All this

data is discussed at grade meetings and inform consequent grade goal setting. Teachers are mindful of English language learners, students with individual education plans and subgroup performance in these meetings. The administration reviews goals at least at the end of each marking period, particularly in English language arts and math. As plans across the school do not consistently incorporate regular, measurable interim checkpoints to monitor and evaluate progress, this process is not sufficiently secure. However, data and anecdotal evidence routinely informs instructional adjustments across the school and teachers are keenly aware of individual student's needs.

The school's review and planning cycle starts with the classroom assessments, which administration builds on to inform the overall picture of the school's development. The learning environment survey and the previous Quality Review report are scrutinized carefully along with attendance, disciplinary and other data, such as parental involvement, to review the success of previous plans and formulate the next cycle of goals. The inquiry team's findings last year were crucial in identifying areas for change. As a result, its work this year, although in the early stages, is integral to the school's development plans for strengthening students' language acquisition. Administration also looks informally at teachers' professional growth as part of this picture.

Procedures for self-evaluation are sound, reflecting an understanding of its strengths and areas that are developing, as well as identifying necessary improvements. The whole community shares a vision of the school as nurturing individual students in their academic, social and emotional growth. The principal's performance review, currently standing as the overarching school plan, accurately reflects the main needs within the school, with measurable success criteria.

## School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: Langston Hughes Young Explorers Academy</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+
<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>	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?		<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>	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?		<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, 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.

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