



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Academy for Language and Technology

High School 365

1700 Macombs Road

Bronx

NY 10453

Principal: Arisleyda Urena

Dates of review: April 30 - May 1, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Sara Carvajal

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Academy for Language and Technology is a high school with 218 students from grade 9 through grade 10. The school population comprises 100% Hispanic students. The student body includes 92% English language learners and no special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 94.0%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 60% eligibility.

The school is in its second full year since inauguration and shares the site with several other academic establishments.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The strategic principal is passionate about the evolving school community. Through the astute use of the school budget, aligned to a philosophy of distributive leadership, the principal has begun to sow instructional leaders throughout the school. Flexible and creative programming has resulted in daily common planning times so that members of the two inquiry teams are able to facilitate the expanding collaborative use of data for focused interdisciplinary unit planning. State of the art technology and gender-specific subject departments provide an effective base for accelerating language and content area understanding. A web-based resource used by all students, maximizes communication between students and staff regarding assorted achievement data, pending assignments and independent learning resources.

Parents and faculty alike are enthusiastic about the school's high expectations, which are continually communicated through a variety of media, including paper communiqués, web-based resources and personal interactions. Faculty explicitly nurture the culture of trust and respect through their daily interactions with each other, students and their families, resulting in a warm, caring environment that is conducive to optimal levels of academic and personal success.

At this time, the school does not dig deeply enough in its comparative subgroup analysis of English language learners and English proficient students to gauge the impact of its resources on content area learning for these distinct populations. Students demonstrate scant ownership of their short-term academic learning goals as illustrated by their difficulty in articulating these. Teachers do not consistently demonstrate effective use of English as a second language methodology when differentiating instruction for students in the second language. Similarly, the school lacks a systematized structure for evaluating teacher goals and professional development at interim checkpoints that measure the improvement in teaching skills as it impacts on student achievement. Nonetheless, the leadership has developed considerable momentum for continued school improvement, and all school constituents have an opportunity to build collaboratively upon the current year's successes.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The strategic principal is an exemplary role model for all members of the community, sharing her vision through many collaborations to raise student achievement.
- The principal and faculty continually communicate high expectations to students and their families to promote strong cohesion among all stakeholders as they plan for continued school improvement.
- The school has adopted a web-based resource that facilitates ongoing, efficient communication of formative data and course expectations between students and teachers to raise academic achievement.
- Students benefit from an increasingly integrated curriculum, which includes a range of technology resources, to support second language learning.
- Relationships among students, teachers and school leaders are warm and respectful, resulting in an environment that is conducive to high levels of academic and personal success.
- Teachers work collaboratively and passionately to exchange ideas and best practices that continually improve student achievement.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend data gathering and analysis practices for subgroups in all core subjects to provide a complete picture of students' progress across all aspects of the school.
- Fine-tune the consistency in setting challenging short-term learning goals so that students understand and own them.
- Promote greater consistency in the effective use of varied English as a second language methodology when differentiating instruction so that students are challenged with questioning which extends their thinking.
- Align professional development with periodic teacher observation data and evaluate the impact of professional development on student achievement.

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 visionary principal has set rigorous structures in place for gathering and analyzing data at interim checkpoints during the school year. Data systems include a wealth of technological resources managed by competent staff members. The principal has modeled, for staff, how to organize the informal and formative student achievement data of English language arts, English language learners, math and global studies onto spreadsheets. This enables staff to: identify inconsistencies in students' test results, perform item analyses for each content area, group students for programming, and strategize instructional planning for deficit areas. Additionally, the principal has enlisted the members of its two inquiry teams to heighten the data expertise of the grade-wide interdisciplinary teams. In this way, all teachers are able to employ the efficient use of spreadsheets to track student progress and plan for differentiated instruction. As a consequence, teachers throughout the site are growing increasingly adept at using a variety of data sources, all of which assess a balance of language proficiency and content knowledge. Similarly, teachers are gaining confidence in generating a variety of in-house, formative assessments across English language arts, math, social studies and science classes, and using this periodic data to rethink and reconstruct interdisciplinary units of study. The principal disaggregates data thoroughly to effectively analyze student achievement and credit accumulation by cohort, by gender and for at-risk students. Using the analyses of gender data, the school has successfully implemented literacy and math institutes that function optimally as they are driven by a consistent gender separation philosophy. However, the school does not compare progress of the English language learners and the English proficient students across content areas consistently.

One of the school's major features is the excellent use of a web-based communication tool, *Teacher Ease*, that is the primary vehicle for communication between teachers and their students. All teachers use the resource to provide students with grade updates and multi-media assignment resources across curriculum areas. Students greatly appreciate the accessibility to teachers that such a program affords them through its email feature. Currently, parents do not yet have their own access to the online program, and as such, they depend significantly on their children to view the data and resources that the school provides electronically. However, parents value the consistent communication with the school via phone calls, daily interface with school personnel, and the school's monthly newsletter, as all provide the personal touch that parents say they prefer.

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.

During its initial year of planning, the school’s agenda revolved considerably around safety due to assorted issues that students were experiencing with their peers on this multi-school site. Parents met often with the school leadership team to devise ways to improve the monitoring and supervising of students to ensure a safe environment conducive to optimal learning. After having successfully addressed the impact of external factors on the school environment, the school leadership team focused on student safety within school. Parents and staff integrate character development into the curriculum in order to effectively support the socialization of the students, many of whom are attending a formal school setting for the first time.

The high expectations for safety, moral values and outstanding academic achievement have blossomed with the undying support of parents. Monthly parent association meetings and informative workshops update and sustain the parents’ understanding of the school’s philosophy and initiatives. As a result, families are becoming more involved with the school and are engaging in richer conversations with their children regarding their progress and achievement

Parents and students express great appreciation for the highly detailed progress reports that most teachers have initiated this year. Quarterly reports document the collaborative goal-setting process between students and their teachers across content areas by noting “review”, “new” and “character” goals. Additionally, the progress reports highlight students’ need to set specific goals, the teachers’ proposed intervention plan for securing the goals, as well as teacher comments regarding past barriers. As a result, some students are able to articulate their specific learning goals for several areas of instruction but the majority of students do not yet demonstrate ownership of specific learning goals across curriculum areas as they solely articulate broad career and achievement goals.

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.

As opposed to investing in a pre-packaged core curriculum, the principal and staff have strategically developed a series of interdisciplinary units, which align with the school’s six marking periods. The *Six Themes of Learning*, which the principal is scaffolding seamlessly across the grades, includes the following overarching topics: identity, diversity, creativity, time, change & continuity, and success. Teachers utilize daily common planning time efficiently to plan collaboratively with colleagues. They craft the data-driven, interdisciplinary units that align precisely with the New York State Standards across content areas and English as a second language

Computer programs, applications and cutting-edge hardware, including varied technology, often support the inquiry-driven projects and collaborative performance tasks embedded in the school’s six interdisciplinary units. Students demonstrate a high comfort level with technology while developing content area knowledge or accelerating

their second language acquisition. This was illustrated when questioning the teacher's instructional "PowerPoint" decks or enthusiastically engaging in electronic surveys to self-assess their understanding during classes.

The principal has intentionally used gender analyses of formative English language arts and math data in order to develop the school's literacy and math departments, which further supplement student achievement. During these daily departmental sessions, students are grouped, based on a combined gender and English language proficiency basis. Specialist teachers then provide each subgroup with intense instruction pitched at each group's level and in which students feel comfortable. The students are thus able to focus exclusively on the learning and teachers can focus on the demonstrated learning needs of their assigned groups. However, the school demonstrates deficiencies in the effective use of varied English as a second language methodology. In particular, teachers do not yet differentiate instruction based on data consistently so that students are fully challenged and that questioning optimizes learning.

The swift success of the school as it concludes its second full year of operation is highly attributable to the principal's investment in building a culture of mutual trust and respect that embraces all stakeholders, establishing instructional leaders throughout the building. In particular, the principal enlists and empowers teachers as leaders in: data analysis, decision-making and professional development. Similarly, she consistently supports the teachers' and students' personal needs and conflicts through tireless problem-solving conversations and flexible, creative programming. Importantly, in an effort to communicate to students and their families that the Bronx is not their only boundary for life-long learning, the school works assiduously to put "the world at their disposal so that they are able to use it. The school achieves this through all-expense paid trips to international destinations, such as Africa, Costa Rica and Nicaragua, for select high-achieving students and to Washington, DC for their parents.

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.

At the onset of the school year, all teachers engaged in a "Teacher Performance Review" process. They self-assessed their level of expertise and set broad, individualized goals that align with the school-wide goals of the Comprehensive Educational Plan. The principal reflects on these teacher goals to ensure that they are congruent with notes from periodic, informal snapshots and learning walk notes. Teachers benefit from a breadth of effective professional development venues. These include: peer visitations, collaborative data analysis, grade-wide unit development with support from Skidmore College, cross-grade conversations, retreats, and periodic learning walks. At mid-year, teachers revisit their goals with the principal to assess goal mastery and set new benchmarks, if needed. The principal and staff anticipate that, at year-end, a similar reflective collaboration will occur to assess progress during the current school year while also supporting plans for future professional development.

The principal's creative programming affords all teachers opportunities for daily common planning periods. The consistent frequency of these sessions enables teachers to accomplish the majority of essential tasks. These include detailed conversations on the data and achievement of specific students, interdisciplinary unit planning, and new teacher mentoring. In order to complement the range of in-house assistance, teachers also receive high quality professional support from outside sources to develop expertise

in strategies and techniques. At this time, the school does not yet evaluate the impact of professional development on student achievement through the use of frequent, interim teacher observation.

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 principal's vision for, "training leaders and nothing less," has been embraced by all stakeholders, motivating them to become increasingly passionate about the journey of the school. Parents exclaim their great appreciation for the significant impact that the dedicated staff has made on individual student achievement through the continuous opportunities for open communication with students and their families. Moreover, parents enthusiastically profess how the principal's fire for success continues to facilitate the evolution of the school as an environment where everyone authentically feels "empowered to live and learn".

Teachers observe that although today's collaborative initiatives in student and teacher goal-setting, planning and learning require much more focus, reflection and energy than in the past, "a team approach achieves results." Teachers particularly value the variety and depth of opportunities for reflective inquiry and planning that they have experienced this year. Additionally, teachers find that students are gaining autonomy in their learning with the support of the *Teacher Ease* system.

Students unanimously recognize that the peer support exemplified by the adults in the school is trickling down to them, resulting in an aura of data-driven teamwork that leads to success. Students are constantly assisting one another in analyzing the credit accumulation reports to devise ways of gaining momentum where deficits exist. Similarly, students look forward to progress reports which validate their arduous efforts across curriculum areas.

In the end, the principal and staff concur, that the "blueprint for learning" which they have developed through reflective practice, sets high standards so that no one is left behind. Instead, students and their families are encouraged to be prepared to move on to become successful, productive members of society.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Academy for Language and Technology	△	▷	✓	+
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, 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.

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