

# Quality Review Report 2008-2009

**The Academy For Career and Living Skills**

**High School 811**

**1434 Longfellow Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10459**

**Principal: Caron Martin**

**Dates of review: April 24 – 28, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Sue Alton**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Academy for Career and Living Skills is a high school with 583 students from grade 8 through grade 12. The school population comprises 33% Black, 60% Hispanic, 3% White, 2% American Indian/Alaskan Native and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 66% of the students enrolled and girls account for 34%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 83.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 76% eligibility.

The school is the largest district 75 school in New York. There are 60 classes based on one site. These classes are divided into three "houses", according to student disabilities, overseen by an assistant principal. The wide range of student disabilities includes learning disabled, pervasive developmental disorders, mental retardation and autism. Students are brought to school each day and collected by 50 buses from across the Bronx, resulting in very long periods on the bus for some students. The staff is very large with over 200 paraprofessionals and therapists supporting the students.

### Overall Evaluation

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

The Academy for Career and Living Arts provides a calm learning environment, where students feel safe and behave very well. As one teacher said, "My classroom is happy: bursting with love!" The principal and her staff are committed to involving parents actively in their child's learning and provide frequent formal and informal opportunities to meet and communicate information on student progress. Parents say this helps them to help their child better at home.

Teachers value the range of carefully planned professional development and increased opportunities to meet to discuss data and successful strategies, as well as taking part in the inquiry process, in order to improve their instruction. Teachers and services work together closely to plan support to help students achieve their learning goals. The school collects a wide range of data to set goals and plan differentiated instruction in English language arts, math and functional life skills. Although students have opportunities to experience other subject areas such as music, physical education and art, the setting of goals in these areas is inconsistent. Teachers gather a wide range of data, which they store in data binders. However, the increasing volume of data is difficult for teachers to maintain, making it more time consuming to evaluate individual and group progress. The student goal setting focuses on individual education plans. Current processes for interim review of these plans lack rigor, making future goal setting and tracking of progress for some students ineffective.

The Comprehensive Educational plan is developed with a small group of staff. Opportunities to involve a wider group of staff and parents are limited, so that there is not a cohesive understanding of whole school goals by the school community. While goals in the whole school plan are measurable and time-framed, they do not always focus specifically on student outcomes.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Parents appreciate the welcome they receive and the frequent opportunities for communication with the school, enabling them to be involved in goal setting and to support their children's learning further at home.
- The school has high expectations for its students and works with care and determination to enable students to benefit from working in more inclusive settings whenever and wherever appropriate.
- Students enjoy school, feel safe and behave extremely well because of the school's supportive ethos, based on mutual trust and respect.
- Professional development is aligned to professional standards and carefully planned to meet individual needs and to enable teachers to review student work collaboratively, to share strategies and to take part in the inquiry process to improve their instruction.
- Teachers collaborate well with services to plan effective support to help students achieve their goals.

### What the school needs to improve

- Ensure all teachers refer to the school's sample curriculum units to set measurable learning goals, plan differentiated instruction and assess progress in the core curriculum, in addition to English language arts and math.
- Improve systems for organizing, analyzing and recording data to ensure they are manageable, effective and consistent across the school.
- Ensure that systems to review and revise student learning plans are rigorous and consistently adhered to in order to support the planning of next steps.
- Establish processes to involve the whole school community in whole school planning and school self-evaluation, so that everyone understands the school's goals and their role and responsibilities in achieving them.
- Ensure short-term goals, planning, monitoring and evaluation focus on student outcomes.

## 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.**

Teachers gather a wide range of data on individual student progress in English language arts, math, functional life skills and behavior. Data in other core subjects is usually related to these areas, resulting in limited opportunities for students to develop their understanding of concepts in other subjects. Since the last review, teachers' use of data binders has become embedded and these binders assist teachers in storing information on the progress of individual students. However, with the increasing amount of data generated, the collation of this information to maintain an overview of the progress of individuals and groups is time consuming and is proving less effective. Teachers comment that the amount of paperwork is "overwhelming". Processes to identify trends or underachievement for classes and groups are developing. An example of this is the process to organize students into houses and the administration is analyzing data to identify the positive impact of this system on students.

The progress of individual English language learners is carefully tracked and information shared with teachers and services to enable them to plan support strategies. The popular after-school enrichment program for English language learners is open to all students in this category. However, students are not targeted to attend through use of data, meaning that some students who would benefit most may not be involved.

Staff help students to understand their next steps through constant reinforcement using picture cues, discussion or reference to rubrics as appropriate. Frequent formal and informal opportunities for parents and teachers to meet to share information about students enable parents to understand their child's needs better and to continue to support learning strategies at home. Teachers are enthusiastic about the impact of a recently introduced database that enables them to provide visual information to parents to show, for example, how student behavior can affect learning, in order to gain parental support to plan ways forward. Parents appreciate the range of information they receive and having "someone always there to listen", without a formal appointment.

**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 meet regularly to discuss individual student progress and to set differentiated learning goals through the individual education planning process. Long-term and short-term goals are measurable and time limited. These goals relate to English language arts, math and functional life skills. Most teachers differentiate instruction in these

curriculum areas for individual students according to the goals in their individual education plans and the support they receive. Differentiated subject-specific goals are not set in any other curriculum areas. Staff constantly reinforce goals with students and parents to involve them actively in the process. Students on work placements can articulate clearly the projects they are working on and the skills they have learned and future goals.

Teachers maintain regular assessments of individual progress towards goals, although this does not always lead to a revision of the goal to provide further challenge or introduce smaller steps of achievement. A review of individual education plans reveals that progress towards short-term goals is not recorded consistently making the review process, transfer of information and planning based on previous learning ineffective for some students.

The Comprehensive Educational Plan contains measurable time-framed goals, although it is unclear what final planned outcome is intended, because these goals are not specifically quantified or consistently linked to student achievement. During the review, teachers demonstrated limited knowledge of school goals and planning. As a result, some staff are unclear how their roles and responsibilities to the achievement of these goals.

Although attendance is low, this is because a number of students have significant medical issues, which affect their attendance. High expectations for students are reflected in the school goal which focuses on movement to a less restrictive environment to encourage students to become increasingly independent. Good preparation by staff, through close observation of students and scrutiny of individual data, supports this process well. This ensures that arrangements for each student are not adjusted until there is strong evidence that any change will bring about success. The number of students who are successful in inclusion classes or work placements is clear evidence of the success of this process.

**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-wide instructional plan is based on themes, providing teachers with sample lesson plans for English language arts, math, science and social studies. It offers good suggestions for differentiated teaching and goal setting related to these subject areas. Although students have a good range of opportunities to take part in other curricular activities, such as art and music, staff say they do not set goals in areas other than English language, arts and functional life skills. This restricts opportunities for students to broaden their experiences and understanding through specific concepts and skills in other subject areas. Only one example of differentiated goal setting in another curriculum area was observed. In this lesson, students were planting seeds. The teacher carefully differentiated the scientific learning goals and activities to ensure all students were engaged and learning at their level in science as well as reinforcing goals in students' individual education plans, resulting in good student progress.

Students enjoy opportunities to take part in a range of activities. These include the “Project Champs” sports program, field trips, music and cooking, which enrich their learning. One innovative program engages students in planning menus, taking food orders from staff, purchasing and preparing food to sell. This practical approach effectively supports students in developing life skills.

Administration makes strategic decisions to support students in reaching their goals. A good example of this is a computer program purchased specifically to support autistic students. Observations show students are more focused, interested in their learning and making good progress. Now other houses in the school are asking for this resource!

Students enjoy school and relationships are very good. They support each other and behave very well. One student said, “I’m lucky to be here. This is a peaceful school.” This is the result of the school’s hard work to establish a supportive ethos, with consistent expectations of behavior, where adults and students trust and respect each other.

**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.**

Administration uses a wide range of data to inform each teacher’s professional development plan, including observations and close dialogue with teachers. Teachers are enthusiastic about the range of professional development to which they have access. New teachers describe the range of support and mentoring which helps them to improve their skills. Opportunities for all staff to meet both formally and informally to discuss student progress and plan the curriculum and instruction have improved since the last review. These include common planning meetings and staff initiated clinics, where teachers can receive support from coaches and mentors. Recently introduced observations sheets that are carefully linked to the professional standards provide teachers with very clear expectations and information on what they need to do in order to improve.

Teachers are encouraged to take part in the inquiry process. Last year the focus of the team was communication. The team used data to demonstrate how a range of custom-made visual resources improve student focus, behavior and learning. As a result, staff now use these resources effectively throughout the school. Following last year’s success, the new focus is to improve the transition process. Already staff observe that because of the work so far, they are able to match placements more closely to student need, ensuring that students continue to develop confidence and take part in relevant activities when they leave the school. Opportunities for teachers to contribute to the Comprehensive Educational Plan are more limited and the content is not communicated effectively to staff.

Detailed guidance plans ensure all students receive the services to which they are entitled. Service providers work closely with teachers to support the achievement of individual education plan goals. The focus on functional life skills ensures students’ movement into independent life is supported well. Students are animated when they describe their achievements in the carefully structured travel program, which supports them towards travelling independently. Opportunities for work-based learning, such as placements at Lehman University, provide good opportunities for students to learn about the world of work and succeed in simple jobs.

**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 underdeveloped with proficient features.**

Staff collect and analyze a range of data for individual students. However, systems to organize this data are difficult for teachers to manage, as they accumulate more and more information. Data is used effectively to organize students into different houses, based on their disability. These houses focus on strategies to support individual students to reach their individual education plan goals with a focus on communication and functional life skills. Services are carefully planned with service providers as are programs appropriate for the students in each house. The principal mandates six review periods for each individual education plan. However, a review of these plans shows that there are inconsistencies in this process. Reviews against short-term goals do not always happen, so that progress is not recorded or goals revised. Where this is the case, the tracking of student progress and future goal setting to improve student achievement is ineffective.

The school self-evaluation contains some evaluation of impact and use of data, but overall it is too descriptive, so that it does not give a clear picture of the school's successes and areas for development or the reasons behind these. Goals in the Comprehensive Educational Plan are not consistently linked to student achievement. Where long-term goals are linked to improving student outcomes, these are specific and time related and measurable. However, short-term goals often relate to actions to be completed within a given time rather than progress towards a long-term goal relating to student achievement. The principal's performance review is carefully aligned to the whole school plan, is evaluated at regular intervals and adjustments made. Systems to involve the wider community in the Comprehensive Educational Plan are limited. Parents had no knowledge of the goals and two teachers did not know what the Comprehensive Educational Plan was. This means that the ability for teachers and parents to shape the plan and contribute to the achievement of goals is very limited.

The principal uses a wide range of data to consider the impact of decisions about the school. This is supported by formal data and information from a range of observations and feedback. Administration considered the development points from the last review very carefully and as a result, progress can be demonstrated in all areas.

# School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: Academy for Career and Living Skills</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, DY0, 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>			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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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>