

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

School for Democracy and Leadership

High School 533

**600 Kingston Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Rebecca Ostro

Dates of review: November 16 - 17, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Ainslie Cumberbatch

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The School for Democracy and Leadership is a high school with 456 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 91% Black, 7% Hispanic, and less than 1% of students from other ethnic groups. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 86.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The School for Democracy and Leadership is a warm, safe, nurturing and supportive environment where parents say it is “hard to fail” because of the many opportunities to catch up. It shares a building with three other schools. Teachers work collaboratively to gather and analyze substantial data from sources that include periodic assessments and classroom instruction to address student needs, including over age students and those who excel. However, this work does not always lead to targeted instruction that results in positive student outcomes. The school has a unique relationship with its lead partner CAMBA that provides families with access to numerous programs that the organization offer to the community. CAMBA also works with the school to secure grant funding for programs and staffing such as the “Leading to College” and “Access to Careers” programs that motivate students. Other partnerships that provide students with opportunities to grow academically and socially include Brooklyn College, the Coro Leadership program, and an exchange program with a high school in Maine.

Staff value the importance of knowing their students well and work together to acquire data from many sources to monitor student progress effectively. Teacher teams examine data, develop action plans, and set goals across grades, subjects and for individuals as well as groups of students, to accelerate student learning. These teacher teams work closely together looking at assessment data and student work. This structure encourages a distributed leadership model that facilitates an improvement in learning outcomes for students. However, the school is not yet fully utilizing this work, as it is does not consistently translate into differentiated and targeted instruction in the classroom. School leaders promote teacher collaboration through thoughtful scheduling. They closely monitor classroom and school progress using in-house surveys, classroom visits, and feedback from department chairpersons and team leaders every other week. Through these mechanisms and frequent “data checkpoints”, leaders identify instructional and professional needs for teachers and students. Students participate regularly in advisory sessions and receive individual academic progress reports between quarters to tell them how they are doing. However, they do not always have a charted roadmap that clearly identifies the next steps. Because of this, student progress is inconsistent. Similarly, although there is a great relationship between parents and the school, parents often are not made aware of how best to support their children academically and are not active participants in school decision-making.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school generates a good range of data to enable it to track students' progress effectively.
 - Staff gather and analyze various assessments that include Acuity, developmental reading assessments (DRA), and diagnostic data to understand student strengths and areas for improvement. By understanding students' needs they develop action plans to address areas of concern thereby leading to improvement in overall student performance.
 - Teachers work collaboratively to gather and analyze data on literacy subgroups from periodic assessments and classroom instruction. As a result, they consistently evaluate the success of identified goals using "data checkpoints" and the review of student work, revising school programs as necessary.
- Teachers implement a focused approach to the gathering, analysis and sharing of school data to examine patterns and trends for subgroups.
 - Administrators and staff use tools that include ARIS, interim progress report data and an internal database to monitor student progress. Subsequently, they are able to regularly assess student progress and use this information to develop action plans to address the needs of students who are overage, as well as those in need of support or enrichment.
- Staff use collaborative, data-informed processes to plan and set goals across grades, subjects and for individual groups of students.
 - The school's conscientious involvement of a cross-section of the school community in planning and setting goals allows for transparency and significant buy-in. The school leadership team reviews formative and summative data and develops goals, which they then share with the larger community for feedback and revisions.
- Teachers consistently collaborate to examine student work and plan together to improve student outcomes.
 - School administrators strongly support the inquiry process by organizing teachers into teams, scheduling multiple blocks of time for teachers to meet and allowing them to select their own inquiry focus. Thus, there is constant conversation school wide about student needs, support, and progress. Teachers remark that, "The sharing of work is beneficial".
 - Teams of teachers meet regularly to review assessment data an student work leading to focused discussions around teacher practice, curriculum development, and the use of available resources.
- The school maintains a strong network of partners that provide students and families with opportunities to grow academically and socially.

- The school's effective partnership with several youth development organizations provides rich opportunities for students in leadership and character development in response to concerns identified in the Learning Environment Survey. These relationships, coupled with the focused work of the pupil personnel team and advisory program, support the implementation of school-wide change products where students design and implement projects in each grade. One student remarked, "The school grooms us to be leaders".
- School leaders regularly evaluate the effectiveness of organizational decisions and professional development making necessary adjustments.
 - The administration's use of in-house surveys and the implementation of group and individual conferences around teaching and learning allows the school to check in on their "vision of excellence". Consequently, administrators gain extensive feedback from teams of teachers about academic and operational practices. As a result, teachers participate willingly in new teacher lunch and learn groups, intensive observation sessions, team meetings, and intervisitations to improve their practice. They work diligently to ensure a cohesive teaching and learning cycle.
 - The strategic scheduling of department and grade teams enable groups of teachers to meet twice a month in department teams to look at student work, review strategies and to design a differentiated curriculum that matches school portfolio projects. Grade teams meet once a week to engage in inquiry work around targeted groups of students. As such, individuals on the teams develop leadership roles that serve to build school capacity as mentors for new teachers and pedagogical experts.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand the delivery of differentiated instruction based on data to reflect purposeful groupings and academic challenges that extend student learning.
 - The school uses a multi-faceted professional development model with a mixture of whole staff professional development and grade/department sessions that underpin a core set of beliefs using the Santa Cruz teaching rubric. However, not all teachers provide data-driven targeted instruction using this model to ensure sustained student learning.
 - Teachers work in department teams to develop a scope and sequence aligned to portfolio presentations that challenge students to produce substantial work products. At present, teams are at different stages of development and as a result, the quality of classroom material is uneven across the school leading to inconsistency in levels of student engagement and rigor.
- Develop a cohesive system to ensure teachers know students' needs and learning styles within each unit of study to provide targeted instruction.
 - Teachers utilize data from formative and summative assessments to plan for instruction developing learning goals for students. However, teacher planning and instruction that reflects a clear understanding of student

needs within each unit of study is not yet an embedded practice, especially in the upper grades. Subsequently, not every cohort of students receives instruction tailored to address their specific learning needs.

- Teachers work in department teams to develop their ability to gather and analyze data to differentiate and plan assessments. At this time, not all classroom instruction reflects differentiation to address individual student needs. As a result, school scholarship varies from grade to grade depending on the teacher's ability to interpret individual student data.
- Establish a clear and congruent approach to grading work that provides students with feedback from rubrics closely aligned to State standards.
 - Teachers use individual academic progress sheets, advisory sessions, and a computer-based program to share information about student progress with students and families. However, this information does not always identify the next learning steps for students. Therefore, students and their parents are often unclear as to how to address the specific learning needs.
 - Teachers meet with students in advisory groups daily and review progress reports with them quarterly, halfway through each marking period. At these meetings, they develop individual action plans. However, progress reports do not always articulate proposed learning outcomes. Subsequently, students refrain from engaging in reflection as to their strengths and areas of need, to determine what steps they should take to improve their learning.
- Extend the level of parent engagement to include consistent opportunities for parents to participate in school decision-making.
 - The school offers development workshops for parents based on needs identified from parent meetings and school surveys. These career workshops capture parental interest and draw them to the school. However, they fail to engage parents in decisions related to programs or activities connected to teaching and learning.
 - School leaders include parents in grant writing activities to solicit funding for initiatives such as the middle school planning grant. This involvement is inconsistent and as a result, parental interaction with the school does not revolve around well-defined instructional school goals.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| School name: The School for Democracy & Leadership | △ | ▷ | ✓ | + |
| Overall QR Score | | | X | |
| Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions. | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i> | △ | ▷ | ✓ | + |
| 1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards? | | | | X |
| 1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products? | | | X | |
| 1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs? | | | | X |
| 1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults? | | | X | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 1 | | | X | |
| Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time. | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school ...</i> | △ | ▷ | ✓ | + |
| 2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level? | | | | X |
| 2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level? | | | X | |
| 2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends? | | | | X |
| 2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes? | | | X | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 2 | | | X | |

| Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning. | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|---|--|----------|-------------------|---|-----------------------|
| <i>To what extent does the school ...</i> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community? | | | | X | | | |
| 3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support? | | | | X | | | |
| 3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level? | | | | X | | | |
| 3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community? | | | X | | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 3 | | | | X | | | |
| Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs. | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers? | | | | X | | | |
| 4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning? | | | | X | | | |
| 4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes? | | | | X | | | |
| 4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals 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 progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning. | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school? | | | | X | | | |
| 5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school? | | | | X | | | |
| 5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time? | | | | X | | | |
| 5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies? | | | | X | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 5 | | | | X | | | |
| Quality Review Scoring Key | | | | | | | |
| Δ | Underdeveloped | ➤ | Underdeveloped with Proficient Features | ✓ | Proficient | + | Well Developed |