

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

STARS Preparatory Academy

Middle School 045

**2351 1st Avenue
New York
NY 10035**

Principal: Maria Aviles

Dates of review: January 26- 27, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Luz Cortazzo

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The STARS Preparatory Academy is a middle school with 385 students from grades 6 through 8. The school population comprises 35% Black, 64% Hispanic, and 1% from other ethnicities. The student body includes 24% English language learners and 27% special education students. Boys account for 48% of students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 85%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

School leaders and staff at the STARS Preparatory Academy have made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement from the last Quality Review. The transition of the school into professional learning communities has had a positive impact, particularly in teachers' planning, curriculum review, and in setting expectations for classroom practice. A cadre of teacher leaders continues to move the school forward and support the principal with a unified vision. The principals' strong belief in distributed leadership has led to strategic planning for teachers to actively collaborate in professional learning communities several times each week. As such, lead teachers have responsibility for initiating conversations so that participants can continually learn from each other and collectively support their own professional growth and increase their content knowledge. Additionally, the strong culture of trust and respect enables teachers to share best practices through the review of professional literature, alongside attendance at professional conferences, and professional development provided at the school and by outside consultants, with a focus on accelerating students' academic growth.

The principal has ensured that a good range of data is gathered and interpreted. The development of formative assessments, such as beginning and end-of-unit tests, the review of students' writing and the analysis of assessment results such as Performance series, coupled with the utilization of summative data, is evident throughout the school. Although this data is available, its analysis is not yet a rigorous school-wide practice, limiting the school's ability to effectively set short-term goals and benchmarks to measure student progress. Although the needs of student subgroups are acknowledged accurately, their progress is not. As a result, higher achieving students generally undertake the same tasks as other students. While accountable talk and higher order skills are evident, they are however, not yet fully embedded across all content areas. As such, not all students are suitably challenged. Although teams of teachers engage in planning and sharing best instructional practices, the analysis of data is not rooted in their planning and they do not always provide for remediation or extensions in order to accelerate the learning of all subgroups.

The strong partnership with parents and focused collaborations with outside organizations have had a positive impact on students' social, emotional and academic development. Parents and staff share in the school's high expectations. School leaders communicate these expectations via progress reports, a monthly newsletter, the school's monthly calendar, school assemblies, and the consistent use of School Messenger, a web-based communication tool for communication between the school and families. However, the school has not taken the important step to include parents in setting long- and short-term goals, or evaluate planning or goal setting systems.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is strategic leader and an exemplary model for all members of the community, sharing her vision through pertinent collaborations to raise student achievement.
 - The principal has embarked on a journey towards the development of professional learning communities by empowering teachers to make decisions. These professional collaborations which align with the school goals have led to improved communication with a variety and depth of opportunities for reflective inquiry and planning.
 - The principal's effective use of the Learning Environment Survey has resulted in the creation of the character education advisory program that engages the students and gives them a voice in those decisions that influence their learning and school policy.
- The school maintains a safe, supportive environment and has high expectations for attendance, learning, and behavior that are clearly and consistently shared with parents and students.
 - The school's inclusive culture is evident by the active participation of parents and staff on the school leadership team. Because of the team's in-depth review of school data, school leaders strategically utilized the budget to establish a student advisory program with students grouped by grade and gender. Consequently, the tone of the school has improved, students are more excited and involved in school, and their self-esteem has grown and carries over into all content areas.
 - Students feel comfortable in their grade- and gender-specific advisories, where they are able to express themselves and reflect upon issues that are relevant to their daily lives. This program has resulted in students' improved behavior and learning outcomes.
- Administrators and teachers use a wide range of assessment data to monitor school-level needs and student progress, plan instruction, and create intervention strategies when needed.
 - The school has developed good data management routines for monitoring and evaluating its effectiveness. This supports the identification of the extent to which whole-school goals are being met and results in organizational and instructional decisions that accelerate student learning.
 - The school's comprehensive review of attendance, suspensions, and State, periodic and classroom-level assessment through the professional learning communities has led to an increase in levels of student attendance, a decrease in suspensions, and the narrowing the achievement gap between subgroups.
- Parents are active partners in their children's education and regularly engage in shared decision-making, resulting in the school community's commitment to the continued improvement of every student.

- In addition to the regular school report cards, the principal sends parents progress reports, which outline their child's accomplishments and goals for improvement, as well as other relevant data and guidelines on how to assist their child at home. Parents are encouraged to e-mail their child's classroom teacher who responds to them in kind. Parents appreciate the administrative staff's open-door policy and feel welcome whenever they visit the school, resulting in parents perceiving their school community as a "home away from home".
- Some students learn to assess their own progress because of the work teachers do with individuals or groups of students to develop reflective practices such as the use of meta-cognitive strategies.
- Professional collaboration is a high priority and faculty profit from varied opportunities to share and develop strengths as individuals and members of the teaching community.
 - The structured professional collaboration evident at weekly meetings of the humanities, math, and science teachers in their respective professional learning communities has resulted in shared leadership as well as school-wide accountability to accelerate student growth. Teachers discuss professional literature, while sharing strategies relative to the specific content area and need of students.
 - Peers support each other's growth by sharing best practices, as well as collegial observations. These collaborations have led to the development of teachers' skills, and steady student progress. The leadership advisory program created by a core of teachers, who serve as the advisory and logistics team, provides great support to colleagues.
- The school provides a range of interesting experiences for many students through collaboration with a plethora of distinctive community organizations that have a positive impact on their social, emotional, and academic development.
 - Focused collaborations with City Year, Margaret's Place, Citizen Schools and College for Every Student, integrated with other school-based supports throughout the day, meet students' needs in a cohesive manner that has a significant positive impact on academic achievement.
 - Members of the student services core team provide professional development on integrated interventions for staff that enables them to support the social and emotional needs of students.

What the school needs to improve

- Build upon the school's curriculum planning to include a structured framework that delivers opportunities for rigorous, challenging instruction in all subject areas.
 - School leaders and staff make purposeful decisions that align the curriculum with key State standards. However, rigorous habits and higher-order skills have not been embedded across all content areas. As a result, not all students are adequately challenged or engaged.

- Develop a consistent system to analyze all relevant data to identify trends in the performance of all subgroups in order to identify needs and monitor progress, particularly for the high achievers.
 - o The school utilizes data to group students based on skills and teachers plan differentiated activities for groups of students. Although the faculty regularly reviews instructional practices, teachers do not always provide interventions or extensions to further accelerate the learning of all subgroups.
 - o Although teachers use data to group students, planning for differentiated instruction is not yet an embedded practice and therefore not all students are not achieving as well as they could, particularly the higher achievers.
- Refine goals and ensure that they all include precise short- and long-term measurable outcomes that enable the school to monitor students' progress effectively, and to reinforce ownership and accountability.
 - o The school has plans that are well documented. However, school leaders cannot not effectively adjust school-wide plans and goals during the course of the year because short- and long-term goals. This results in their inability to measure student progress accurately or to make timely adjustments to accelerate progress.
 - o Teacher teams and individual teachers use Periodic assessment data to track the progress the progress of individual students' subgroups, but the assessments are not common from grade to grade.
- Refine action planning so that progress can be measured, readjustments made, and success evaluated.
 - o School leaders are in the process of developing systems for measuring progress and identifying areas where improvement in plans or strategies are needed.
 - o Teams of teachers and individual teachers are still developing systems for measuring progress towards interim goals that they have set for groups of students or targeted individual students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: STARS Preparatory Academy	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed