

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**New York City Laboratory School for Collaborative
Studies**

**Middle School 312
333 West 17th Street
Manhattan
NY 10011**

Principal: Megan Adams

Dates of review: April 12 – 13, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Daria Rigney

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

New York City Laboratory School for Collaborative Studies is a middle school with 565 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 7% Black, 10% Hispanic, 39% White, and 44% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 97.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

In this screened school, which shares its campus with two high schools, the principal is an organized, energetic leader who understands the importance of analyzing all data sources on a school level and works hard to monitor trends in academic performance especially for the lowest one-third of students. While there are some pockets of promising practices of using student data to plan instruction and monitor student progress, at this time, all teachers are not collecting and using data to identify and meet student needs and improve instructional practices.

Collaborative and accessible, this school leader welcomes parents, teachers and students as partners in school planning and improvement initiatives and has created multiple opportunities for sharing school data with all stakeholders. Students are enthusiastic about the support they receive from staff members and credit their teachers with “always giving opportunities to help yourself” whether in afterschool tutoring or in lunchtime small groups.

Teachers enjoy creating interesting assignments and projects for students and employ a variety of engaging group activities that explore complex content areas and teach critical skills. The school’s emphasis on collaborative learning nurtures an academic environment that encourages students to share ideas, generate questions, and develop their own hypothesis. The curriculum, however, does not provide a consistent and rigorous framework for planning and implementing robust student work across all subject areas. In addition, there is currently no effective mechanism in the school to evaluate and adjust curriculum within and across grades.

Administrators have created multiple opportunities for teachers to meet within both grade levels and subject areas. This has led to a high level of teacher collaboration across the school, including teacher teams configured for a variety of purposes. However, the absence of student work with a concomitant analysis of students’ strengths and needs diminishes the possibilities of connecting teacher practice to student outcomes.

The principal has employed a wide variety of measures to improve communication among staff, parents, and administrators. Parents and students give her high marks on her consistent accessibility, her willingness to take all concerns seriously and her efforts to create an inclusive, supportive community for all youngsters. The principal’s marshalling of school resources in the service of this goal has resulted in a wholesome, student-centered school environment which offers multiple opportunities for participation in the school community.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has instituted a variety of measures that enhance her ability to communicate school goals and expectations to the entire school community.
 - The principal's well established initiatives, such as a 'state of the school' address in January and a blog for frequent correspondence with parents, demonstrate a strong commitment to ongoing close communication with families in the communication of instructional priorities and school goals.
 - The protocol for teacher email correspondence results in parent concerns being addressed in a timely manner demonstrating the school's dedication to family engagement.
- The principal and her cabinet have established dependable practices for communicating student progress updates to parents and supporting students in monitoring their progress toward attaining learning goals.
 - A school-designed template enables staff to support students in their learning. Students articulate their learning targets and continually review and reflect on their work as evidence of their progress towards meeting their goals.
 - All projects are accompanied by clearly crafted rubrics, which students use to improve their work and share with parents in order to explain next steps in achieving learning goals in skills, process, and content areas.
- The principal is committed to using a variety of structures for building a close-knit community of teachers, administrators and parents to generate and implement school goals.
 - The principal plans with the school leadership team several times during the summer to build a strong partnership rooted in data and shared with all stakeholders ensuring that the rationale behind goals and action plans is evident to the entire community.
 - The principal utilizes regular meetings with teachers and parents to discuss and analyze multiple sources of school data, including state test results, attendance data and learning environment survey results in order to demonstrate the rationale for specific school goals.
- Teachers are committed to the creation of student assignments that are based on a collaborative design in order to motivate and engage all students.
 - In a grade 7 science class on genetics, each student group studied a different animal, most of which were in the classroom, in order to answer questions on evolutionary history, classification and natural habitat. There were multiple opportunities for all students to contribute to the groups' assigned work, allowing for differentiation in content and process.
 - In a grade 8 math class, students worked in groups on a variety of problems according to their learning targets. Students were required to

apply math thinking in order to solve the problems, with each one varying in complexity in order that all students were challenged.

- The principal and her cabinet have set into motion a variety of concrete and successful measures which support teachers in meeting students' social and emotional needs both within the classrooms and after school.
 - The dean of students, with the principal's support, provides targeted professional development for teachers in developing a menu of tools for dealing with conflict creatively and effectively in the classroom resulting in a dramatic decrease in incidents of disruption or misbehavior.
 - The school has joined with a variety of new partners to provide an array of attractive afterschool options for students including Road Runners club, High Line partnership, Fulton Youth project and a wide selection of sports offerings providing a wide array of experiences that enrich students' extracurricular opportunities.
- The principal and her staff have created school structures that enhance a wholesome culture where students feel safe, respected and full participants in decision-making.
 - Students cite the many student-generated clubs that support them in exploring their ethnic and gender affiliations as an important aspect of their emotional and social development. Examples can be found in the Asian Culture club where all students are invited to learn about issues specific to their Chinese peers as well as in a club that discusses gender identification issues in a non-judgmental, safe environment.
 - The school has instituted an advisory program for grade 6 students wherein they meet in small groups to discuss challenges in adjusting to middle school. One student noted, "Teachers make a point of making us feel they're there for us...every kid has a teacher they feel close to."

What the school needs to improve

- Develop and regularly evaluate curricula that include both essential goals and specific references to skills, understandings, assessments and activities for a range of students including the highest achieving students.
 - There is no system in place for evaluating the effectiveness of curricular frameworks and goals against student achievement and adjusting in order to improve plans. As a result, curricular maps are currently inconsistently configured across grades and subjects. Some departments include time frames and cite specific outcomes while others do neither. In addition, curricula maps do not chart expectations that are sufficiently rigorous. For instance, in one 8 week long grade 8 humanities unit, the only text that students are expected to read is Chapters 1 through 5 in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and in a grade 7 humanities class, students spend six weeks reading Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.
- Build teachers' expertise in analyzing a variety of data, including summative, formative, and student work, in order to precisely and effectively assess students' strengths and needs and evaluate the effectiveness of these systems.

- In a grade 7 math class on probability, the teacher taught a whole class lesson through a power point presentation and presented a series of questions to the students. She asked the class whether the lesson was easy, hard or just right and the class answered, “Easy.” There was no evidence that she had assessed the students and knew what they had already mastered nor their next learning steps.
- Teachers brought students’ persuasive essays to their team meeting but did not analyze the student work to evidence or categorize students’ needs or strengths. As a result they are not able to plan precise learning steps for groups of students.
- Consolidate student data in order to formulate relevant and coherent interim goals for all students, including subgroups, students below par, and students who need additional challenges.
 - During a grade 8 art class, the teacher introduced a quilting project that involved the students designing and executing a quilt block. Students were asked narrate memories during a whole class discussion. Three students narrated their stories to the entire class. The teacher did not have differentiated goals for students based on assessments of their understanding of the project or their artistic strengths and therefore was unable to set appropriate learning targets for individual students.
 - In both grade 6 and 7 science classes, teachers conferred with students but did not have any strategy for collecting data on students’ understanding in order to teach the steps the next learning steps.
- Improve the work of teacher teams by demonstrating the link between collaborative inquiry and accelerated student learning while supporting the development of effective teacher leaders.
 - A grade 7 teacher team designed an inquiry on kinesthetic movement in students’ learning of science concepts. They prepared a lesson and included a performance assessment to determine the effect on the students’ learning. The members hypothesized that their students are kinesthetic learners; however they did not have a target group or an assessment tool to measure the effectiveness of their work. Because the school has no evaluation tool to measure the effectiveness of teacher teams, it is unclear that the current investment of time and resources is leading to better student outcomes.
 - A grade 6 teacher team had no agenda for their meeting and explained that the focus for their meetings was “to become a better CTT pair.” They described their team time as valuable in planning modifications for special education students but did not provide evidence that this work led to improved teacher practice.

School name: Laboratory School for Collaborative Studies	△	▶	✓	+
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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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