

# Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**The Collaborative Academy of Science, Technology and  
Language Arts Education School**

**Middle School 345**

**220 Henry Street  
New York  
NY 10002**

**Principal: Judith De Los Santos-Pena**

**Dates of review: March 18 - 19, 2010**

**Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Collaborative Academy of Science, Technology and Language Arts Education (CASTLE) school is a middle school with 292 students from grade 6 through 8. The school population comprises 18% Black, 62% Hispanic, 3% White, and 15% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 93.1%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 54% eligibility.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

The CASTLE middle school opened in September 2006 and a new administrative team, including principal and assistant principal, assumed school leadership in July 2009. The school shares a building with two other schools and a NASA Lab and Challenger Space Center. CASTLE prepares Lower East Side students academically for top high schools and supports adolescents' social and emotional development.

The principal and assistant principal are keenly aware of the school's strengths and challenges, and they thoughtfully involve parents, teachers, and students in school improvement decisions and actions. One challenge that the new administrative team addressed was declining satisfaction with the school as measured by the School Survey. The team launched several community-building initiatives, which have had a positive effect. Other ongoing challenges, however, include curricular inconsistencies in math and the arts, and consideration of learning needs of higher achieving students.

School leaders astutely identified two fundamental priorities this year: improvement in student writing and active engagement of all staff in the inquiry process. The school has devoted significant resources and attention to these goals. Teachers' schedules now include multiple common meeting times, and professional development aligns with and supports this instructional work. Teachers of varying backgrounds and experience levels note that school leaders "value and appreciate" their professionalism and afford them opportunities to assume leadership roles in grade and department teams. In addition, the administrative team and coaches offer teachers regular, insightful feedback on classroom instruction and use of student data for strategic planning. Classrooms show consistent teaching practices, but differentiated instruction for all learners is not firmly in place across the school. The school needs to develop more capacity to assess student learning using performance tasks and teacher-designed tools.

The CASTLE school maintains a positive culture where teacher and student interactions are respectful and constructive. As a result, teachers collaborate frequently in teams, and students learn in an environment of high expectations. Though there are clear goals and benchmarks in some areas of the school, the school has not developed those goals and benchmarks in classrooms and departments.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Teachers benefit from insightful instructional feedback that sharpens the consistency of effective teaching practices.
  - All teachers develop individual growth plans in partnership with school leaders and based upon the Santa Cruz professional teaching standards. Teachers meet privately with school leaders three times a year to set benchmark goals, self-reflect on current practice, and plan next steps.
  - The three new teachers at the school receive intensive mentoring and coaching supports. Additionally, since 50% of faculty is untenured, the school provides all teachers with targeted, constructive professional development. As a result, professional discourse among teachers is at a high level with frequent opportunities for collaborative learning.
- The school has established very effective systems for collecting, analyzing, and using a wide range of student data to plan instruction and create intervention strategies when needed.
  - Students' overall attendance has increased from 93.1% in 2008–09 to 94% so far during the 2009-10 school year. This 0.9% rise is monitored closely by an attendance team and results from purposeful strategies to engage students more through Friday electives and Town Hall meetings.
  - To ensure consistency of data collection and usage, the school has developed teacher data binders to document goals set at the class and individual level. All teachers analyze students' progress from a baseline assessment and monthly student work, and they adjust extended day and other programming using an array of student data. Similarly, school leaders rely heavily on both quantitative and qualitative data to provide useful feedback and tips for teachers to improve instructional planning.
- Teachers engage productively in professional collaborations, including teams devoted to working through a process of inquiry, which results in shared practices and leadership development.
  - Over 90% of teachers participate in inquiry through five teams that meet weekly as subject area departments and one school-wide team. While the focus and target students vary, what unifies this school's inquiry approach is a shared communication and deepening of content and pedagogical expertise that has led to strong collegiality and shared practice across the staff.
  - The school encourages teams of teachers to build their leadership skills both in and outside of school. For example, the entire science department attended a National Science Teachers Association conference, while another group of four teachers pursue administrative licenses through their inquiry work at the school and via coursework at Baruch College, and special education teachers participate in training and visits to other schools.

- The new administrative team is proactive in understanding and addressing problems and issues by making sense of student achievement data and honoring teacher professionalism.
  - The new principal and assistant principal recognized early on that many teachers felt disconnected from decision making and took intentional steps to address this concern. For example, the annual faculty retreat was scheduled locally and 100% of teachers participated. Similarly, significant resources support teachers meeting as teams, which empowers teachers and fosters collaboration.
  - Teacher teams have become the primary structure for grade-level planning, curricular mapping, assessing students' progress, and professional development. Administrators closely monitor and support the work and interactions within teams, and they regularly coach team leaders in effective protocols and facilitation techniques which strengthens leadership development.
- The school makes organizational decisions within a coherent framework designed to support the academic growth of students.
  - A major instructional goal this year is to improve student writing, with special attention to current and former English language learners on the cusp of meeting standards. Instead of relying solely on the English language arts department to spearhead this goal, the school engages all grade and department teams, as well as parent and student leaders, to address this academic concern.
  - Teachers use a school-wide rubric to assess student writing across content areas, with time, resources, and professional development in place to support this initiative. Additionally, staff planned several writing celebrations and strategically organized two cycles of writing clinics as part of the extended day program to increase student writing proficiency.
- Faculty convey high expectations for students' personal and academic development to both students and parents, and the school engages these key stakeholders in school-wide decision making.
  - The staff's commitment to strengthening school community is highly evident in new student structures, such as a Senate and Town Hall meetings, and improved communication systems, including more frequent parent workshops and a school website.
  - The school was awarded grant funding to promote parents' usage of the ARIS tools. This commitment to engage parents more meaningfully in their children's school experiences has led to greater parent involvement. For example, at the fall parent-teacher conferences, 100% of fifty surveyed parents noted that teachers shared data and 83% reviewed student work with parents. Parents are very satisfied with how the school informs and engages them in instructional initiatives, such as writing.

## **What the school needs to improve**

- Develop further the school's curricula to ensure greater coherence in math and a breadth of arts experiences for all learners.
  - With recent turnover in math teachers, the school lacks agreement within the math department about optimal math curricula or approach. Math teachers use three different math programs and textbooks, while the math coach works hard to ensure alignment with State standards.
  - All students benefit from high quality music instruction, but there is limited exposure to visual, dance, or theater arts, except in after school settings. This lack of variety limits student exposure to all arts.
- Extend the good teaching strategy of scaffolding by deepening differentiation of instruction, especially to challenge higher achievers through greater rigor.
  - Most lessons follow a workshop model format with adequate scaffolding supports, such as graphic organizers and visuals. Engagement is highest in English language arts and science classes, where group work and choice occur regularly, but less so in lessons where teacher-student interactions dominate.
  - The school offers Regents-level classes for high-performing students, but there are few examples in non-accelerated classes of teaching strategies that push rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills.
- Build upon the successful model of the school's inquiry teams by including measurable long-term outcomes with interim checkpoints in all goals across the school to monitor progress and growth.
  - Whereas the school's inquiry teams excel at monitoring learning progress for target population students, this practice has not fully taken root at the class or department level. For example, data binders for special education classes lack clear academic goals and defined milestones to monitor students' progress.
  - The school issues four interim progress reports to parents annually, but the feedback is largely focused on students' behavior, work habits, and effort, rather than progress in meeting academic benchmarks. This is in contrast to meetings and conferences with teachers, where parents and students receive comprehensive performance data.
- Develop further teachers' expertise in designing performance assessments and self-reflections to capture precisely the extent of students' learning.
  - The newly developed student portfolios have the potential for greater self-reflection by students on their long-term learning progress. Currently, however, the portfolios are not used or reviewed systematically.
  - Teachers reliably employ rubrics and written assessments, but there are few examples of teacher-designed performance assessments in which to evaluate student achievement. The school-wide writing rubric is a notable exception.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

<b>School name: Collaborative Academy of Science, Technology and Language Arts Education School</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?			<b>X</b>	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?				<b>X</b>
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?				<b>X</b>
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?				<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>				<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>							
<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			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X				
<b>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.</b>							
<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				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				X			
<b>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.</b>							
<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				
<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>