

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

The Louis Armstrong School

Middle School 227

32-02 Junction Boulevard

Queens

NY 11369

Principal: William Fahey

Dates of review: February 2 - 3, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Dr. Philip A. Composto

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Louis Armstrong School is a middle school with 1,598 students from grade 5 through grade 8. The school population comprises 16% Black, 35% Hispanic, 32% White, and 17% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 95%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Louis Armstrong School is a vibrant, safe and well-run environment that is highly supportive of the academic and personal growth of students. The principal, in this his first year, along with able assistant principals, promote a strong vision for the school's future and a spirit of collaboration among staff, students and parents. The curriculum is aligned to State standards and provides opportunities for students to advance by taking Regents, living environment and integrated algebra courses. In addition, students value highly the arts and music programs that the school offers.

Teaming is an essential component of the school, which has empowered teachers to be leaders. As a result, they are key partners in the decision making process. During team meetings, data is analyzed and used to identify students' strengths and areas of challenge. Teachers collaboratively, evaluate curriculum and research instructional strategies to modify and adjust classroom instruction with shared best practices to address the needs of students. The school effectively uses data to track and, improve student outcomes with teachers, across all grades, collecting and analyzing data from which to plan students' work. Teachers use data to consider differentiation of instruction for students at varying performance levels but whilst differentiation has been a topic of professional development, its implementation is not actualized in every classroom.

School leaders and staff work collaboratively to develop specific and measurable goals to drive improvement in the school. Improvement goals are very clearly communicated and understood well by all members of the school community. However, the lack of interim goals and benchmarks in most action plans to measure incremental targets makes it difficult for the school to monitor progress towards its goals. Whilst teachers engage students in reciprocal and ongoing discussions regarding their progress, a system to evaluate student work and notebooks and written assignments is applied inconsistently across all grades. As a result, students do not always receive sufficient feedback indicating their next learning steps.

Parents appreciate the many modes of communication in English and Spanish through: school calendars, progress reports, phone calls and emails. However, parents state that they would benefit if all teachers used the school's website to list homework, goals and next steps to support greater daily involvement with their children's academic growth. The parent coordinator works very successfully to maintain home school links. The parents are unanimous in saying "This school is fabulous. The staff always help the children. All kids are welcomed".

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school provides a very safe, nurturing environment in which every student is encouraged to grow both academically and as an individual, and where they feel respected by fellow students and adults alike.
 - Teachers volunteer their time and allow students to return to the classroom for tutoring. A student stated, “When the work is hard, you can go to tutoring during lunch.” This positively impacts on the students’ academic growth as, for example, students receive special attention in finding supportive details towards developing their literacy skills and identifying the main idea to improve their reading comprehension.
 - The school encourages a student voice and active participation through the student organization which meets once a week where one representative from each homeroom and one alternate representative attend. Once a month they meet with the principal where school-wide issues are discussed and addressed. As a result, student activities are well planned, the school environment is very positive and student concerns are effectively addressed. Students highly value opportunities to plan and participate in holiday dance events.
- The school meticulously collects and uses a wide range of data to create a concise picture of the individual students’ strengths and areas of need.
 - School leaders use data from ARIS, New York Start, Progress Report, Quality Reviews, standardized tests, informal and formal portfolio assessments to efficiently set school level goals. School goals for English language learners focus on improving their skills in writing English.
 - After reviewing the new State testing calendar, and in order for students to be taught the full curriculum before being assessed, English language arts and math teachers have modified pacing calendars to ensure the skills to be taught follow the new time line.
- The diligent principal has created a learning community that is well focused on student outcomes with a clear vision to continue to accelerate learning.
 - Teachers meet regularly on common preps and at lunchtime to establish focused goals and fully analyze student progress to improve learning across all subjects. During this time, teachers share specific action plans and effective lessons to support the school’s goals in accelerating student progress.
 - School leaders clearly communicate school goals and action plans which result in the school community working together effectively to support student learning. The school consistently uses: calendars, newsletters and emails to notify parents, students and staff of the instructional plans and practices that inform them of the school’s direction.

- As a result of the principal's strong belief in distributed leadership, staff is energized by the positive impact their collaborative efforts are making on raising student achievement.
 - A vast majority of teachers are engaged in structural professional collaboration on teams using an inquiry approach, which results in teachers sharing best practices. One of the teacher teams shared the use of instructional strategies such as, “chunking information” and using context clues to improve reading comprehension skills for their select group of students. As a result, students’ reading competences have improved.
 - Each team has set up a collaborative inquiry page on ARIS to identify their particular focus area and goals for their targeted students. All teacher teams successfully use the ARIS inquiry space profile to summarize their process of investigation and action in accelerating the learning outcomes of their targeted group. As a result, teachers want to be at the school and volunteer to be a “professional friend” where they support each other to improve teacher practice. One teacher stated, “Who wouldn’t want to teach at Louie, it is a great place.”
- Leaders use a wide range of data to evaluate regularly the effectiveness of organizational decisions, interventions, professional development supports and deployment of staff and make adjustments.
 - Teacher initiated professional development is based on student needs, school and departmental goals which result in improved student achievement. School leaders use teacher reflection and surveys to evaluate the impact of professional development and teacher collaboration practices. As a result, professional development is differentiated to address the needs of individual teachers.
 - Student work, classroom walkthroughs and teacher feedback are used to review teacher capacity building and teacher retention. As a result, teachers receive immediate advice and professional support to make improvements in their instructional practice.
- Teachers work effectively in collaborative teams to share good practice and utilize data to successfully identify trends.
 - Teacher teams and individual teachers consistently supplement informal data analysis by examining periodic assessment and classroom level data on student subgroups to identify trends and adjust curricular and instructional decisions. The grade 8 instructional support service team has chosen to use an instructional strategy that focuses on finding the main idea within a passage of reading. As a result, students’ ability to identify the main idea of a reading passage has significantly improved.
 - Teams of teachers and individual teachers use student portfolios to create a crisp picture of how well students are advancing toward meeting key standards and curricula. As a result, teachers acquire important feedback related to their instructional decisions.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen teachers' responses to each student's work to reflect guiding comments and level of performance to convey clear next learning steps so that students may accelerate their progress.
 - Student work is available in well-organized notebooks in addition to the displays throughout the rooms and is used to celebrate students' best efforts and to inform instruction. However, not all student work includes comments for improvement. Consequently, some teachers do not fully evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum decisions to consistently provide students with their next learning steps.
- Promote greater consistency across the school in differentiated instruction so that lesson planning reflects suitable groupings, challenging tasks and questioning to extend thinking to maximize learning.
 - The school focuses on supporting high needs students by offering academic intervention services. However, high performing students are sometimes under-challenged and their individual learning needs are not always addressed through differentiated lessons that probe and extend their thinking.
 - The school offers some Regents courses. However, enrichment programs are not always available to high performing students, therefore limiting additional opportunities for students to participate in a broad range of critical thinking activities.
- Explore ways in which teachers convey information to parents to promote greater engagement in school activities and decision-making.
 - Parents voiced their appreciation for the dedicated staff and their effort to keep them informed about their children's progress. Parents expressed that only a few teachers use the school's website daily to post homework and to keep them updated on their children's progress and next learning steps. Parents feel that if all teachers use the school's website, they can further support learning at home and increase student goal achievement.
- Refine systems for measuring progress towards interim goals and benchmarks for all plans so that progress can be measured, readjustments better made and success evaluated accurately.
 - The school uses annual planning processes such as the Comprehensive Educational Plan. However, it has yet to consistently formalize systems to set interim goals and benchmarks throughout the year to target effective instruction to meet the needs of all students.
 - A collaborative system to determine progress of teacher teams toward interim and long-term goals has not yet been formally established to evaluate the effectiveness of such teams.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Louis Armstrong School	△	➤	✓	+
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