

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

The Active Learning Elementary School

Early Childhood Center 244

137-20 Franklin Avenue

Queens

NY 11355

Principal: Ivan Tolentino

Dates of review: November 16 – 17, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Diane T. Kay

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Active Learning Elementary School is an early childhood school with 218 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 2. The school population comprises 1% Black, 11% Hispanic, 2% White, and 83% Asian students. The student body includes 36% English language learners and 5% 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 95.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Active Learning Elementary School opened its doors in a brand new facility in September 2008. The dynamic principal founded the school and is passionate about its growing pre-kindergarten through grade 3 population and evolving school culture. High expectations and effective communication result in the strong sense of community described by all stakeholders. Parents see themselves as true partners in their children's education, and even the youngest of learners are given opportunities to reflect on learning through peer partnerships and other age-appropriate means. These supportive relationships, which include strong partnerships with community-based organizations, drive the school's nurturing environment and allow students to learn in a secure environment.

Curriculum development has been a priority for this new school, and it has some good structures in place to collect and analyze information about student performance at the end of each unit. Additionally, the school uses interim and end-of-year assessments to establish baselines and set annual goals. However, the school is still working to improve consistency in the use of ongoing assessments, so that progress towards interim goals is adequately monitored. Regular data collection and analysis is not yet consistent and optimally used to determine next learning steps for the school's highest and lowest achievers and its large population of English language learners. As a result, there is still work to be done to better scaffold instruction and work products in order to improve differentiated instruction in classrooms.

The school is keenly aware that it is growing its new culture and sees professional development as a priority to build coherence and consistency. Teacher teams meet after school weekly and during common preparation periods. The staff sees these collaborative interactions as valuable supports. The principal's frequent feedback, in addition to coaching and workshops, individualizes their professional development, clarifies expectations and results in continuous improvement of practice. The principal recognizes that teachers, especially those who were part of the planning and opening of the school, are ready to take on new leadership roles. However, structures to encourage teacher empowerment, like examining teacher work and peer feedback, are not yet part of the school's culture. Additionally, the school's inquiry work is not yet focused on improving teacher practice in ways that impact school wide decisions and encourage distributive leadership. Nonetheless, this school's strong collaborative culture and sense of community offer much support to build on current success.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- High expectations are communicated and shared by all members of the school community so that all stakeholders take ownership of the rigorous academic goals set for students.
 - The school developed “TALES”, an interim student action plan, in consultation with the school leadership team. Parents rave about this innovative tool which regularly delineates their children’s academic/social goals and guides them how to support their children’s learning at home. Additionally, parents and teachers regularly exchange phone calls, e-mails and chats at dismissal time. As a result, parents feel like true partners in their children’s education.
 - Teachers encourage even the youngest of students to reflect on their learning through the use of charts, student conferences and student partnerships. Attendance is also a community effort. The principal tracks and posts attendance data in the general office and invites families to celebrate the school’s current high rate of 97% attendance through a system of reward certificates.
- The school places high priority on curriculum development resulting in frequent review, discussion and revision of units of study by teacher teams.
 - Pacing calendars and detailed units of study, which include scopes and sequences, resources and school-generated end-of-unit rubrics, have been developed for all core subjects. Teacher teams meet weekly and work closely with the school’s literacy coach to preview units and examine student outcomes in order to make necessary curricular revisions.
 - Recently, oral language goals were added to the school’s reading curriculum in response to data gleaned around the school’s growing population of English language learners. As a result, classroom pedagogy reflects a greater emphasis on vocabulary development and oral language strategies, including choral speaking and role-playing.
- The school has developed effective systems and structures to collect and analyze available data about the school that leads to strategic organizational and instructional decisions.
 - The principal has created detailed spreadsheets to analyze formative data from DRA, ECLAS and end-of year math assessments in order to collect baseline reading and math data about the school in June. These baselines currently drive annual improvement goals and focus the school with clear and objective targets.
 - Every teacher utilizes a Student Achievement Management System (SAMS) to collect formative and summative assessment data and student work samples in all major subjects in order to track student progress and provide targeted assistance to students. Teacher teams meet each week to make curricular adjustments and plan next steps. These practices are leading to greater instructional consistency across the school.

- The school's relationships with home and community are highly supportive resulting in an environment that promotes the social, emotional and academic growth of these young learners.
 - This small community is very close. The principal knows students by name, and, parents and students report that teachers are very kind and caring. Even the youngest of students are free to learn in this safe and nurturing environment.
 - Fitness and Nutrition for Kids (FAN) holds the school true to its founding premise providing healthy living advice to parents and students through workshops and presentations. After school and Saturday partnerships, such as the Chinese American Parent Association (CAPA), and Red Shan Tree support the school's English as a second language goals and provide homework help.
- The principal is an analytic thinker who makes informed and strategic organizational decisions in order to support student learning.
 - Through well managed scheduling and budgeting, the principal is able to provide common preparatory periods and weekly workshops for teachers. These regular collaborative meetings provide staff with opportunities to reflect on and refine instructional practice as they build a common vision. The principal also developed a "Language Through Movement" course to help address the identified needs of English language learners.
- Teachers benefit from effective professional development systems that help them reflect on their practice and develop consistent and improved instructional strategies.
 - Every teacher self reflects through a needs assessment and collaborates with the principal to develop an Individualized Professional Plan (IPP). Differentiated support includes 1:1 coaching, workshops, outside conferences, consultants and regular teacher meetings. The school prioritizes professional development and understands its importance in building a coherent culture in this new and growing school.
 - Clear expectations for classroom environment, instruction and assessment are outlined in the "Tales Teacher Efficacy Standards". The principal makes frequent visits to all classrooms providing detailed oral and written feedback around this instrument. Teachers report that ongoing supervisory support helps to clarify bottom lines for instruction and focuses them on priorities and next steps for their development.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend and embed the culture of collaborative inquiry where teachers reflect on problems of practice, use action research and provide each other with meaningful feedback.
 - There is already a core value placed on collaboration at all levels of the organization, and teachers are developing inquiry skills. However,

teachers only view the work as an opportunity to share and adjust classroom practice. They are not yet empowered by the process and do not yet see its potential to inform school wide decisions and change school culture.

- There are no structures in place that enable teachers to gather data in peer classrooms, examine conditions of learning for target populations or offer constructive feedback to each other based on actual observation in order to improve learning outcomes.
- Extend the use of data and assessment to deepen differentiated instruction so that all students are challenged and tasks are scaffolded to maximize student learning.
 - Teachers gather data about their students everyday and use it to tailor small group instruction and student conferences. However, the scaffolding of tasks and activities is not yet fully developed. As a result, the work of the school's most challenged students and highest achievers does not yet look significantly different.
 - The staff have not taken ownership of school-developed unit rubrics through which they can provide ongoing, actionable information about student achievement, clarify next steps and document student progress towards goals between interim assessments.
- Expand systems and structures to monitor the progress of the school's sub-groups and target populations towards long-term and interim achievement goals.
 - The school formally monitors interim progress towards June goals for all students, including subgroups and lowest achievers, at mid-year. Systems to monitor interim progress at more strategic intervals are not fully developed or congruent.
 - The connections between ongoing assessment, instruction and progress in student work are not always evident in the student portfolios of sub-groups and targeted students. As a result, the needs of these students are not consistently addressed across all grades and classes.
- Improve current professional development evaluation and needs assessments to include structures for distributive leadership in order to promote teacher ownership of the school's initiatives.
 - Teacher teams have not yet fully developed structures for examining student and teacher work together. As a result, measurements of progress towards interim goals and feedback to students are not consistent across the school or evident as part of the school's embedded culture.
 - The school relies heavily on the literacy coach to drive professional development and facilitate teacher teams. Systems to encourage and evaluate the growth of teacher leaders are lacking. As a result, teachers do not always embrace and own school initiatives.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Active Learning Elementary 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