

# Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**Pioneer Academy**

**40-20 100<sup>th</sup> Street  
Corona  
NY 11368**

**Principal: Cecilia Jackson**

**Dates of review: May 27- 28, 2010**

**Lead Reviewer: Madelene Chan**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Pioneer Academy is an elementary school with 484 students from prekindergarten through grade 2. The school population comprises 3% Black, 90% Hispanic, 1% White, 4% Asian students, and 2% other. The student body includes 44% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 96%.

### Overall Evaluation

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

Pioneer Academy has adapted well to the significant increase to 10 kindergarten classes during this school year, an increase of five additional classes from the prior year. Despite the change in registers, the school has a pulse on what is important to its students and community. Every morning the principal greets each student by name. The school provides a very safe, caring environment where students are engaged in learning and appreciate the support they receive for their personal and academic development.

The review of a wide range of data provides the principal and staff with essential information relative to school, class, and student performance that is used effectively to assess students' needs and inform instruction. However, at this time the school does not yet regularly evaluate information gathered from school-wide and classroom assessments to monitor student performance and progress towards meetings identified goals. Professional engagement is a priority and faculty benefit from multiple opportunities to share and develop strengths in both voluntary and scheduled settings. Although there is a significant amount of professional development, this process is not transparent in observation reports, and the school does not yet review and refine its formal and informal teacher observation tools to help monitor and promote good teaching practice.

Teachers utilize an inquiry approach to examine student work, plan together, and share ideas and best practices through a desire to improve student outcomes. Yet a writing curriculum is not in place that emphasizes rigorous habits, individualized student accountability, a consistent grading system, or a systematic approach to evaluating progress. In addition, although differentiation is evident in some lessons, the school does not yet promote consistency in the effective use of varied English language learner methodology when differentiating instruction so that this targeted group of students is challenged with questions that extend their thinking

The school community works diligently to establish a collaborative environment. Parents appreciate that their children are well known by many members of the staff and that school rules are "strict yet fair". Through the efforts of the parent coordinator over 40 high interest workshops have been provided for parents this year. As a result of this collaboration, outstanding parent support highlight effective parent involvement and leadership of families in order to monitor, revise and evaluate the success of assessment tools, data systems, and communication progress.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school provides a safe, caring environment where students are engaged in learning and appreciate the support they receive for their personal and academic development
  - Parents, students and staff agree that there is a school ambiance of well-being and hope. These opinions are validated upon morning arrival where the principal and other staff members greet every child by name, telling them to have a great day. Students state that the school is an extension of their home because they are cared for and everyone at the school has their best interest as a priority.
  - Classroom teachers meet regularly with ancillary staff to discuss the academic and emotional needs of each student and plan collaboratively to support students with suitable next steps. Staff effectively use various classroom data, such as baseline writing assessments, running records, and benchmark/text level assessments, to outline their plans to provide a common focus and structure to support student achievement.
- The review of a wide range of data provides the principal and staff with essential information relative to school, class, and student performance that is used effectively to assess students' needs and inform instruction.
  - The principal and her staff formally review students' data five times a year in reading and writing and three times a year in math to track students' progress and recognize trends in performance. As a result, the school ably identifies and provides academic interventions to help students who are not on grade level. Academic intervention teachers continually analyze students' pre- and post-standard-based assessments to determine the instructional level students need to reach and the best practices that will assist their progress.
  - Using Design Your Own assessments, a formal literacy assessment system, grade level writing rubrics, a teacher developed kindergarten math rubric, and teacher designed pre- and post-tests in science, teachers carefully examine classroom-level data, make connections to students' needs, and devise a plan of action towards improvement in a timely manner. A review of results from the pre- and post-science tests helps teachers to target individual student's weaknesses of science concepts and then create leveled groups in science for future lessons.
- Teachers utilize an inquiry approach to examine student work, plan together, and share ideas and best practices through a desire to improve student outcomes.
  - Pre-kindergarten through grade 2 teachers' work together on a regular basis to examine their differentiated instructional practices in order to address needs of the whole class and targeted students involved in this year's inquiry focus of vocabulary development. Short-term, measurable goals utilizing read alouds to strengthen vocabulary skills are created for students and qualitative data, picture inventories, and teachers' reflection notes are used as assessments to measure mastery. Targeted students

are successfully meeting set goals and no longer in need of the extra support.

- Teachers are empowered to change their instructional awareness through data analysis, decision-making and professional development opportunities, to ensure differentiation and high levels of engagement for their students. A core inquiry team, comprised of representatives across the grades, meets regularly and on a voluntary basis, to discuss the implementation of the research-based methods, the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). Teachers use the results to guide instruction that is supportive of raising the reading comprehension level for English language learners.
- Professional engagement is a priority and faculty benefit from multiple opportunities to share and develop strengths in both voluntary and scheduled settings.
  - The school allows all teachers to participate in purposeful professional development based on a common instructional focus through consultant assistance, in-house coach facilitation, and classroom inter-visitations among colleagues. Goals of the meetings are to improve teachers' craft for improving English as a second language instruction, differentiating data analysis, and aligning student data with lesson planning. As a result, grade-level teams have designed a "Google docs" account to share instructional practices on line so that it can guide the expansion of goal-aligned professional development and equip teachers with strategies around planning for students of varying skill levels.
  - A Title B Science Grant and "Peer on Peer Development" are two programs that afford teachers with leadership opportunities. The Title B Science Grant enables teachers to partner with the Hall of Science on Saturdays and after school for a total of 90 hours of professional development over two years to better understanding the instructional benefits of scientific inquiry and hands-on approaches to learning. The partnership resulted in the development of a data-informed science curriculum that incorporated a thematic approach in addition to emphasizing the learning expectations of subgroups of kindergarten through grade 2 students. "Peer on Peer Development" is a school wide initiative to video tape teachers' lessons reflecting best practices and develop a resource library for the staff.
- The school community works diligently to establish a collaborative environment and regularly communicates clearly focused ways for families to assist with student achievement.
  - The principal and the staff meet regularly to discuss ways in which parents can become well versed about the curriculum and instruction their children are receiving. A family survey that is distributed in September and a bilingual monthly progress report indicating each student's grade level in all subject areas, serves as an effective conduit for these conversations. Parents' monthly comments on the report, that every student returns signed to the school, shares measurable goals for parents to work with and help their child at home. As a result, parents are more aware of the school's curriculum and individual expectations for their children.

- Parents state that they are “present and involved” in all aspects of the school day. Parents as volunteers are actively involved in 80% of the building, on a daily basis volunteering in classrooms and assisting teachers with artistic tasks. Teachers provide parents with their preparation schedules and calling times so they are available to provide assistance, and answer any questions and concerns. As a result of this involvement and on-going conversations parents have learned how to incorporate academic strategies, like the supermarket game, that promote math and reading skills so that school learning can be reinforced.
- Effective strategies for evaluating assessment practices enables the school to monitor and revise practices as needed.
  - The parent involvement program is closely aligned with the program representing National Standards for Parental/Family Involvement, which enables parents to have a voice in the curriculum, and instructional practices that take place in the school. Parent workshops encourage parents to ask questions about the curriculum and ways their children are being assessed. Parents then offer ideas about instructional change and programs they believe their children need. This allows parents to feel valued as “change agents” in their children’s education. As a result of this collaboration, the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan was reviewed and refined.
  - Scheduled workshops like Cornell University’s “Energy Efficiency Workshop”, Learning Leaders’ “Storytelling and Bookmaking Program”, Queens Library’s free tours for parents and children, ARIS parent workshops and Sylvan Learning Center’s “English classes for parents” are programs that were designed to broaden parents’ awareness about curriculum and school practice and give them an opportunity to ask questions and offer suggestions that would improve student outcomes. Parents made it clear that the ARIS system is difficult for them to readily access because they do not own a computer at home. As a result, the school developed a system for parents to use the computers in the school and at the local library.

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

- Adapt a writing curriculum that emphasizes rigorous habits, individualized student accountability, a consistent grading system, and a systematic approach to evaluating progress.
  - The current writing curriculum is a combination of the Writers’ Workshop model and the Teachers’ College philosophy. Lessons are culled from genre-based topics and various writing skills are outlined in teacher created and published rubrics. However, it is not evident that the school or teachers have a consistent curriculum to follow so that writing standards are addressed across the grades and evaluated according to the needs of the students.
  - Students’ writing pieces are displayed around the school and placed in their portfolios. A three and four star rubric is available for viewing in most classrooms, but not implemented as a consistent school-wide grading system. At this time there is no formal process in place for grading students’ writing in a rigorous and unified manner so that students can use their results as a springboard for their next at steps.

- Review and refine formal and informal teacher observation tools to help monitor and promote good teaching practice.
  - As the sole administrator in the building the principal has the responsibility of facilitating all of the observations. The observational tool is prepared as a checklist citing specific commendations and recommendations. However, teacher recommendations are not being analyzed or aligned to the school's theory of action for improving student achievement and current school-wide goals. Additionally, the school's observational tool has not yet generated the necessary conversations or summary of outcomes to offer differentiated support for all teachers.
- Regularly evaluate information gathered from school-wide and classroom assessments to monitor student performance and progress.
  - The principal is diligent in monitoring data that is collected by the staff throughout the year. However, at this time it is not yet fully evident that the collection process is supportive of measuring progress towards interim and long-term goals.
  - The inquiry team reviews the data of their targeted students on a regular basis determining what the next instructional steps should be for them. Presently there is no system in place to determine if the goals for the inquiry students are aligned with the long-term and annual planning goals of their class, grade, or school.
- Promote greater consistency in the effective use of varied English as a second language methodology when setting differentiated goals so that targeted students are appropriately challenged with questions that extend their thinking.
  - Classroom instruction provides some differentiated methods, however the lack of clarity around the use of resources for English language learners limits the effectiveness of the curriculum in meeting their instructional goals.
  - Instructional practice for English language learners follows whole group and small group approaches to learning. However, there is a lack of challenge that includes goals for accountable talk, higher order thinking skills, and diversified planning during instructional time and individual tasks. Therefore, students are not yet required to respond to questions that are deep in reflection, and emphasize opinions, personal experiences, and prior knowledge.

<b>School name: Pioneers Academy</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
<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>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
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>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
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>