Quality Review Report

2009-2010

The Queens College School for Math, Science and Technology

Elementary - Middle School 499

148-20 Reeves Avenue
Queens
NY 11367

Principal: Helene Jacob

Dates of review: March 8 - 9, 2010
Lead Reviewer: Diane T. Kay

Information about the school

The Queens College School for Math, Science, and Technology is an elementary/middle school with 510 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 40% Black, 19% Hispanic, 6% White, and 34% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 4% 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 97%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The school was founded on solid ties to community, which continue to help define it. It operates under a memorandum of understanding between Queens College and the New York City Department of Education. Students are chosen by lottery to attend the school from all seven community districts within Queens. Through strong partnerships with mammoth organizations like Queens College, Lincoln Center, and Columbia Teachers College, the school is truly a community of learners. Staff, parents, and students speak very positively about the nurturing environment of the school, which feels like "home" to many students and their families after affiliation for ten or more years. Students are especially vocal advocates of the education they receive at the school stating that they are challenged, but supported, by their caring teachers. Parents feel very welcome at the school and are pleased by the school's recently improved communication structures that more thoroughly include them in their children's academic development.

While fully embracing the collaborative spirit of the school community, the new principal has brought refreshed clarity to its mission. Through her leadership, the school has rallied around a commitment to increased rigor of the literacy curriculum. Writing has become a special focus, and newfound consistency and rigor of instruction and learning is evident in student folders and displays of student work throughout the school. School leaders and faculty effectively collect and analyze a wide range of data using both Department of Education accountability tools and homegrown instruments to support efforts to identify strengths and weaknesses across the school, grades, subjects, and classes. Despite best efforts, the school has room to grow in the short-term tracking and use of data to delineate next learning steps, so that fine-tuned, targeted interventions can be made. This has meant that the school has not yet achieved maximum effectiveness of differentiated instruction for the school's lowest and highest achievers.

Teachers are supportive of the changes in direction their professional development is taking them this year. Additionally, they state that they have been unified around literacy instruction through high-quality professional development structures that actively engage and support them. There is a great deal of trust among the teachers, and they enjoy working together in collaborative teams. However, teacher teams and school leaders have not yet fully developed systems to ensure the ongoing review, evaluation, and refinement of assessment and data collection practices. This hampers their ability to define appropriate interim benchmarks, so that progress towards long-term goals can be carefully monitored, next steps clearly defined, and appropriate action taken. Nonetheless, this school's strong sense of community offers much support to build on current success.

What the school does well

- Relationships between staff, parents, and students are very supportive and result in a safe, stable learning environment where students are encouraged to contribute to both school and community.

  o According to parents and students, this pre-kindergarten through grade 8 school is a place where families and students "grow up". Students are well known by name and feel totally supported by caring staff members who enable them to focus on learning in a warm, safe environment.

  o The student council positively impacts student attendance by publicly graphing class attendance each month and recognizing excellent attendance with student and class awards. Additionally, the student council pursues philanthropic activities, such as the Penny Harvest and City Harvest. In addition, the ARISTA students, guided by the staff advisor, organized the recent Haiti Relief Walkathon and Readathon for the student body. Students feel empowered by their management of these activities, which also offers them opportunities to apply higher-level communication skills.

- The school has forged highly effective community partnerships that prioritize students' social and emotional growth, which positively affect academic achievement.

  o The school's long-standing partnership with Lincoln Center deeply embeds aesthetic education into the school's culture. Students learn at first hand the inspirational effects the arts have on social, emotional, and intellectual satisfaction, and the products of this association pervade the school environment. This year's focus on theater arts is especially supportive of the school's goal to promote critical thinking through response writing and lifelong appreciation of the arts.

  o The Community Collaboration for Change meets during lunch periods with students to provide counseling, academic, and career skill-building in order to boost self-esteem and positively impact achievement. The school's full time guidance counselor also provides students with ongoing services that keep students and their families informed and active in the positive decisions and choices that impact their lives.

- School leaders make purposeful and strategic organizational decisions that drive the school's instructional goals and improve learning.

  o After assessing a need to increase the rigor of writing across the school, school leaders purchased intensive literacy support from Columbia Teachers College, which has positively impacted instructional consistency and outcomes in English language arts. Additionally, the school's circular 6 administrative options menu now includes an item providing time for teachers to meet in collaborative teams during the regular school day. Teachers use this time to analyze student outcomes, clarify student goals, and promote consistent pedagogical practice.

- The school uses and develops effective tools and structures to collect and analyze data that have led to improvement in instruction.

  o School leaders create an overview of summative and formative performance trends for grade, class, and subgroup using effective tools such as ARIS, Teachers College Assessment Pro, and school-developed comparative bar graphs. Using grade and class bar graphs, the principal noted the significant comparative underperformance of grade 3 in both English language arts and math, which led to changes in personnel assignments and additional support for at-risk students.

  o Individual teachers use a variety of structures including assessment and conference notebooks, computer software systems, and spreadsheets to collect, organize, and make sense of the range of data they collect on an ongoing basis. Teachers use data from math skill checklists and running record analyses, for example, to identify individuals and groups of students that are in need of targeted assistance.

- The school communicates high expectations so that all stakeholders take ownership of students' development and academic growth.

  o A new family handbook provides clear and concise information about school policies including attendance, lateness, behavior, and homework. The school reinforces expectations to students during assembly programs, and parents and staff regularly exchange information through newsletters, interim progress reports, phone calls, and informal chats. The entire school community clearly understands its roles and responsibilities in supporting student performance and progress goals.

  o Parents rave about the variety of informative workshops offered to them this year. Topics include ARIS Parent Links, reading/writing workshops, math, science, and cyber-bullying. Parents feel that the information they receive about their children's academic and social life at school enables them to better support their children at home.

- Teachers benefit from effective professional development systems that help them reflect on their practice and develop consistent and improved instructional strategies.

  o The staff is immersed in a wide variety of effective professional development structures. Teachers and their supervisors attend outside workshops and study groups, and share their learning with colleagues at faculty, grade, and "Lunch and Learn" conferences. Teachers refer to the new principal and their literacy coach as literacy "experts" and value their leadership as a strong support that has improved their practice. Teachers at this school trust each other and value working collaboratively. They visit each other's classrooms and reflect on best practices together regularly in order to continually improve instruction and learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve the ongoing tracking of student progress so that it leads to adjustments in goals and action plans.

- o School leaders and faculty collect and monitor the results of common classroom assessments like running records, on-demand writing, and math unit tests. However, these results are not always used to adjust goals and plans effectively. Teachers' records and student work folders do not consistently show evidence of targeted attention to stagnant progress. As a result, the school misses opportunities for timely interventions.

- o The school is still working to build capacity to consistently delineate next learning steps, so that the entire school community is clear about what needs to be done to achieve interim goals. This hampers the school's overall ability to provide highly effective support and enrichment.

- Expand systems for monitoring and evaluating data collection and use of assessments in order to increase consistency and coherence of practice across the school.

  - o The school's instructional cabinet, core inquiry team, and multiple teacher teams meet frequently with a view toward improving instruction and learning. However, the school has not yet incorporated the regular review of teachers' data and assessment collections into these meetings to ensure consistency among teachers and adjust the capacity of these tools to improve conditions of learning.

- Develop benchmarks that enable school leaders and staff to measure progress towards interim and long-term goals so that adjustments can be made in a timely manner.

  - o Through their instructional cabinet and core inquiry team, school leaders are developing structures to track progress towards school wide goals. However, progress towards interim goals is not always clearly identified. This inhibits the school's ability to revise its long-range goals and plans in response to intermediate progress.

  - o Spreadsheets that track student progress often do not include a targeted end goal or benchmarked timeline, so that delayed or advanced progress can be highlighted. As a result, teachers and teacher teams miss opportunities to modify practice and accelerate learning.

- Extend structures for differentiated learning, so that all students are fully engaged in their learning and challenged to perform at the highest levels of their ability.

  - o Teachers circulate to assess understanding and assist individuals and groups of students during the independent work segment of lessons. However, at times, assignments remain too challenging for some learners, especially in the upper grades. Therefore, without one-to-one support, some students are not able to complete them. When tasks are scaffolded, students are not always matched strategically, so that engagement levels and the ability to complete the activity vary from student to student. Teachers have been given guidelines for small group and one-to-one conferences, but they do not yet consistently implement them school wide. Subsequently, the school's lowest and highest achievers are not yet fully supported to achieve their greatest potential.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Queens College School for Math, Science and Technology	Δ	➤	✓	+
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.				
To what extent does the school regularly…	Δ	➤	✓	+
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.				
To what extent does the school …	Δ	➤	✓	+
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.

To what extent does the school …	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.

To what extent does the school…	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.

To what extent does the school…	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**