

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

The New School for Leadership and the Arts

**Middle School X244
120 West 231st Street
Bronx
NY 10463**

Principal: Dolores Peterson

Dates of review: March 20 – 21, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Sonia Menendez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The New School for Leadership and the Arts is a middle school with 668 students from sixth through grade eight. The school population comprises 16% Black, 76% Hispanic, 2% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 23% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 91.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school provides an extremely safe environment with an excellent level of social/emotional and academic supports that result in high student attendance and improved progress. (1.4)
 - The school consistently uses data, such as attendance, suspensions, periodic assessments, state and school level assessments, to identify student needs and guide improvements. For example, after analyzing these data sources, the school concluded that students would benefit from smaller learning communities that focused on the arts and developed student leadership. The school then re-organized itself into two small learning academies with an extensive range of extra curricular activities that motivate students to achieve. Before or after school students may participate in many different clubs such as Cadets, arts, running, basketball and chess. One student stated, “My behavior is better and I have learned how to control myself. The sports and the Cadets programs have helped me to become a good person and work hard.” The school has good attendance procedures in place to address any lapses; parents state that the phone messaging system reminds them to ensure their children get to school on time. These efforts have indeed increased student motivation, as evidenced by student attendance improving from 89% to 92%, English language arts scores increasing by 4.6% and mathematics scores increasing by 19.7% from the previous year.
 - The principal has a deep commitment to the belief that each student must be well known by an adult in the school and was “tired of the triage method of supporting kids,” motivating her to establish a comprehensive guidance program. In September, students complete a survey and are matched with a guidance counselor who gets to know them well. It is quite common to see a guidance counselor sit with a student during class time to provide one on one support during a lesson. Counselors also lead advisories to address topics such as bullying and they conduct study hall to provide extra tutoring for students who need additional help. This emphasis on individual support is one of the most significant factors in motivating students. As a result, graduating students have received over \$150,000 in scholarships to private and parochial schools.
- The school effectively conveys high expectations to students and parents that result in a deep commitment to the school’s vision. (3.4)
 - Success is celebrated during “Honors Night” where teachers, parents and students are rewarded for exemplary work. The school provides parents with continuous information on how well their children are learning via report cards, progress reports and Engrade, an on-line reporting system. In an effort to better support students and effectively work with families, the school administers a student survey that aids the school to better understand the circumstances of different families and differentiate support accordingly. Guidance counselors work closely with families and actively assist in the completion of high school applications ensuring that students and families make good choices when selecting high schools. The emphasis on high standards and open exchange of information

results in an atmosphere of care and support. Consequently, parents report appreciating the high expectations for attendance, good citizenship and academic effort within a highly inclusive and welcoming environment.

- The school has expertly designed its curriculum, aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), with challenging tasks that engage a variety of students. (1.1)
 - The curriculum has been successfully developed to provide content rich learning that is well aligned to the CCLS. For example, students are involved in a unit that explores presidential elections and their impact on American society. One performance task challenges students to write a speech endorsing a current presidential candidate. In order to ensure that English language learners and students with special needs receive the same level of instruction with the same curriculum, teachers modify the texts and even rewrite articles so they are at students' instructional levels. As a result, the curriculum provides interest and support for students' academic growth as evident in results on the latest periodic assessment demonstrating that fewer students scored in Tier 1.
- Teachers work effectively in collaborative teams in order to increase student outcomes. (2.2)
 - In addition to periodic assessments, the faculty works in teams to develop performance tasks with rubrics that are embedded in the curriculum. These are used as supplemental data to identify areas of need and strength in order to plan next steps for student learning. This information is then shared with support personnel who identify appropriate interventions. As a result, students receive targeted instruction that leads to improved student writing as evident in work products in their portfolios.
 - Teachers generate and collect a wide range of supplemental data, managed with a tracking system which reports each student's past and present year results on standardized exams, interim assessments, attendance, interventions and other information relevant to student performance. The school uses the research of Robert Balfanz, which identifies key indicators that need to be addressed in the sixth grade for middle school success and beyond. As a result, teachers use these indicators to gather a clear picture of student strengths and areas of need to provide targeted supports so that students are on track to succeed.
- The school strategically uses its budget and resources to build teacher capacity and support improvements in student learning. (1.3)
 - The three assistant principals work closely with the principal to monitor teaching and learning and work with staff to develop best practices to raise student achievement. Lead literacy and math teachers support colleagues by facilitating grade and content meetings, developing units of study, identifying resources and co-teaching lessons. All classrooms have Smartboards and laptops to support research based projects. Students benefit from these support systems as evident in writing samples that demonstrate improvement in the use of research skills.

- The schedule allows for teachers to meet weekly by grade, enabling them to develop units of study, uniform rubrics and criteria for looking at student work and performance tasks that are aligned to the CCLS. Working collaboratively with the lead teacher, teacher teams brainstorm performance tasks using Bloom’s taxonomy as a guide. For example, students are asked to respond to how elections have changed American society in an analytical essay. As a result of this work, students engage in challenging tasks and their writing has improved from their September baseline as evidenced by their midline writing sample.
- The school provides effective professional development that supports a respectful environment resulting in high student engagement. (4.4)
 - The school guidance services offer students strong support via individual and group counseling with focused advisories. Guidance counselors and the dean provide workshops for staff and parents in order to engage everyone in conversations around the academic and social needs of students. One guidance counselor sponsors a young sister’s sorority group that engages girls in service activities that expand their leadership skills. Another works tirelessly to support students and their families during the articulation process to high school, garnering over \$150,000 in scholarships. As a result, the school has broadened students’ access to opportunities that expand their learning and raise their aspirations.
 - As a result of analyzing information from the school survey and a review of attendance and suspension data, the school focused efforts to implement more activities to engage students. For example, to support a positive relationship with the community, students partnered with the Bronx Teen Center and the New York Botanical Garden to create a greenhouse that will expand to the farmer’s market this summer. In addition, students participate in ballroom dancing, dance, visual arts, chess, band and many sports activities that result in students winning several dance competitions as well as students reporting that their artistic talents have improved and that they “the school is a great place.”

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen differentiated teaching practices so that lessons reflect purposeful grouping and learning activities in order to challenge all students. (1.2)
 - Teachers provide lessons that are engaging with opportunities for students to work in pairs or groups. Some teachers use texts that they have rewritten from more challenging articles in order to support students with different reading levels. Although students work in collaborative groups, this does not always include differentiated tasks with resources at varying levels or address diverse learning styles. As a result, students with special needs or higher achieving students are not always provided with opportunities that challenge them to higher levels of achievement.
 - The school believes in motivating students with an engaging curriculum using Bloom’s taxonomy. The principal challenges teachers to develop higher order questions with three possible answers then decide what scaffolds students will need to be successful in responding to the questions. However, all lessons do not consistently incorporate effective

questioning techniques, leading to missed opportunities to elicit higher order thinking skills or sufficient challenge, for all students.

- Enhance the goal setting process to include differentiated short and long term learning goals with interim benchmarks in order to accelerate the progress of student subgroups.(3.2)
 - Teachers develop goals for students that are aligned to the goals identified in the school's Comprehensive Education Plan. Interventions and extended day supports are provided to enhance student learning. However, the goals are not sufficiently differentiated with interim benchmarks to ensure that all subgroups are on a clear path to mastery. Consequently, there are missed opportunities to make timely adjustments to instruction and curricula and, as a result, student subgroups do not always receive the supports necessary for academic growth.
 - Teachers' goals are posted in their classrooms as visual reminders of expectations. Although the goals have leveraged changes in classroom practices to make lessons more engaging, students are not well versed in their individual goals and what explicit next steps are needed for success. As a result, some students were unsure of what steps they needed to take to meet goals and opportunities for student improvement are missed.
- Sharpen school improvement planning by identifying specific interim check points that enable the school to monitor and evaluate progress towards meeting long term goals and make necessary adjustments. (5.3)
 - The school effectively uses student data to track student performance and progress, setting the foundation for long term planning. However, these procedures are not sufficiently expanded to identify areas for development in the curriculum and instruction in order to make timely adjustments and improvement to ensure long-term impact. As a result, the school cannot strategically narrow the gap between teaching and learning and further support students' opportunities to succeed.
 - Administrators and teachers routinely monitor the learning outcomes of students, using this information to identify long-term goals for students. However, the goal setting process lacks specificity of timeframes with interim checkpoints and benchmarks in order to gauge progress towards attaining long term goals. As a result, it is difficult for the school to fully ascertain the impact of teaching practices or unit plans on student learning limiting students' acceleration to higher levels.
- Strengthen teacher observation and feedback process so that all teachers receive differentiated information on areas of strength and those needing further development in order to build on effective pedagogy. (4.1)
 - School leaders visit classrooms regularly to monitor the quality and effectiveness of instruction and provide teachers feedback. Administrators have moved away from their prior practice of using the Santa Cruz framework for feedback and are beginning to study the use of another common framework. However, feedback lacks specificity and does not align to collaboratively developed goals, thus teachers do not receive feedback that targets agreed upon professional goals, nor do they

receive next steps to accelerate their practice, leading to missed opportunities to promote greater student learning outcomes.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: The New School for Leadership and the Arts X244	UD	D	P	WD
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			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
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?			X	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?			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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?				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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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, with particular attention to the CCLS?			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				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed