



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Essex Street Academy

High School 294

**350 Grand Street
New York
NY 10002**

Principal: Alex Shub

Dates of review: March 5 - 6, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Sue Alton

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Essex Street Academy is a high school with 270 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 24% Black, 56% Hispanic, 14% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 86.5%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 75% eligibility.

The school opened in 2004 and new grades opened each year. This year will have the first graduating class for Essex Street Academy. It shares the building with four other schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a charismatic and visionary leader who recognizes and develops leadership skills in his staff very effectively.
- A wide range of data is collated and used very well to identify issues and trends and to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.
- The school has very good systems which enable all staff to have a clear understanding of the progress of individuals, classes and grades.
- All staff work together very well as a team to improve instruction and learning opportunities for students..
- Behavior and relationships are excellent and based on mutual trust and respect.
- The innovative curriculum, using portfolios, motivates students and encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Students make very good progress because they know what they need to do to achieve through the use of carefully structured rubrics.
- Professional development is varied and differentiated to the needs of staff and the school and staff value these experiences.
- Excellent student support from a range of staff which include outside organizations is very well co-ordinated, tracked and evaluated.

What the school needs to improve

- Support teachers to use data consistently to differentiate and modify instruction to meet the full range of capabilities within the class.
- Develop ways to set further quantifiable goals in the strategic planning tool, which include interim measurable goals to track progress.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

This highly effective school puts students' emotional and academic success at the heart of all it does. As a result, students achieve well, despite many entering the school below grade level. Students, parents and staff report that they are inspired by the principal and his commitment to the school. He has successfully developed distributed leadership and very effective teamwork, so that improvements are, as one teacher describes, "Organic, from the ground up. It's inspiring." Teachers have excellent knowledge of the performance and progress of individual students. Carefully devised rubrics enable students to keep a check on their learning and what they need to do to improve. They receive exceptional and very well planned support from counselors and guidance services. As a result, students behave well and relationships are excellent. The school compares its success with peer schools. However, formal achievement data is not available because this is the first graduation year. The graduation goal for this first graduation year is 85% which is significantly higher than similar schools.

The innovative skills-based curriculum is enhanced by a good range of other learning opportunities which encourage students to use skills across subjects. Technology is not used consistently as a tool for learning in lessons and not all teachers use data to modify and differentiate instruction to meet the varying needs of students. Professional development has a high profile. It is effectively differentiated to the needs of the school and individual staff. The impact of professional development activities are carefully tracked to ensure they make a difference to student achievement. Very good partnerships with outside organizations support students' academic and emotional development very well and students comment positively on the way these have helped with their learning and preparation for college and the world of work. The inquiry team, also known as the promotional committee, uses data very effectively to identify and track those students in most need of support and to evaluate the success of interventions. Progress since the last review is good. Project based learning is well established and rubrics identify measurable goals for success in all grades. The baseline achievement of all students is measured upon entry to the school and used to identify individual progress and to set goals. As yet, the school does not have an established system to set quantifiable interim goals that are time sensitive and objectively measureable.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school has very good computerized systems to track student progress using data. Students are assessed upon entry to the school to provide a baseline against which to measure progress. As a result, the school has a very clear picture of individual student progress and achievement, as well as class and grade progress, through regular assessment. Students receive regular feedback on their progress, from all staff. The computerized data-tracking program enables all staff to know about individual successes. The use of rubrics in each curriculum area involves students, including special education and English language learners, very successfully in knowing where they are and what they need to do in order to achieve. This approach has contributed to the very good progress made by most students. When any student shows signs of falling behind, support is promptly put into place.

All staff are very well supported in using data to inform planning and to track student progress. The new data specialist supports the staff to refine data further to look at progress from semester to semester, across subjects and across different teachers. Although the school has found no particular differences between the achievement and progress of groups, it is keeping this under review as it analyzes new data. In addition, the work from a professional research team is being used to support this process. The school compares its success with peer schools. However, comparison of graduation rates is not available because this is the first graduation year.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school works together very well to set goals for improvement, using its own strategic planning tool which identifies school aims and steps towards achieving these. Teachers engage students very well in planning their next steps in learning. Progress is regularly evaluated against interim goals, although these goals are not always quantifiable. The promotional committee work collaboratively to review student portfolios and support records to identify which students need further support and decide a plan for this. Students name the teacher they prefer to work with as part of this support, which forms part of the plan. This creative approach supports the effective engagement of students in making improvements in specific areas, relevant to their needs.

Goals are effectively communicated to the whole school community through regular meetings, discussions, phone calls, emails and bulletins and teachers meet regularly with each other, as well as with administration and cabinet, to review the success of their teaching in subjects and across grades and to compare the progress of individual students. Subject meetings regularly focus on the work of 3 students of differing performance levels. Teachers formally reflect on their own teaching, noting successes

and areas where improvements need to be made. These reflections are discussed candidly at faculty meetings, with peers and faculty leaders to plan strategies to improve achievement in the subject. Students and parents know their goals and what they need to do to improve. As one parent said, "You know where your children are and have time to put things right." The website and internet also provide relevant information about expectations and learning, which parents value.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The innovative, skills based curriculum motivates and engages students very well. It is enhanced by a good range of other opportunities which include art, music and modern languages. Technology is used very well to support students' learning in digital music and students show that they have developed good word processing skills as they present their projects. However, technology is not used consistently as a tool for learning in most other lessons. All staff use data very effectively to track student performance across grades and in each skill of the "Habits of Mind" curriculum. This approach effectively encourages students to develop skills, which they can use in all subject areas as well as their daily lives. Students enjoy presenting projects to assessment panels, to demonstrate the range of skills they have acquired including analytical thinking and conceptual knowledge. This process supports students very well in their preparation for college. Data is used very effectively by all staff to analyze student progress and plan improvements. However, it is not used consistently by some teachers to take into account the range of performance levels within the class in order to modify and differentiate instruction accordingly.

Very good budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are made strategically, using data, for example maintaining small classes to support students academically and emotionally has contributed to the good progress made by students. A very effective data program has been purchased and high quality professional development has enabled all staff to enter data, track student progress, support offered and the effectiveness of intervention. Behavior and relationships are excellent, based on mutual trust and respect and as a result the school is a calm environment conducive to learning. There are very well coordinated systems to encourage good attendance and to follow up students who "cut" classes. Students speak of the dedication of the staff as well as their love for the principal. As one student said, "It's a great school. Everyone is cared for. No one is outside or alone. Someone always comes along to help."

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

Professional development is of a very high standard and valued by all staff. It makes a very effective contribution to improving their skills and expertise. The highly effective and strategic use of data supports careful planning of professional development to

ensure it meets individual staff needs as well as school priorities. Preparation for faculty meetings provides very good opportunities to enable teachers to reflect critically on their teaching and the focus is always on improving student learning. These reflections are systematically monitored and tracked by the assistant principal to ensure that decisions made are making a difference in the classroom. One teacher said, "We're always focusing on improving our practice for our students." Frequent observations of teaching by administration and peers supports further improvement in teaching skills, including the innovative use of video-taped lessons to re-consider strategies as a group. New teachers are allocated mentors and a range of very good support to ensure that they understand the curriculum and how it should be taught.

The principal's visionary leadership and his approach to distributing leadership responsibilities across his staff team, ensures that the school runs smoothly because everyone takes responsibility. The excellent guidance and advice to students is carefully tracked and coordinated through the school's data system. Its outstanding success is based on the trust that is built up between the advisor and the student, with a focus at looking at the root cause of problems and identifying the solution together. As one student said, "My advisor is always there to back me up. If I'm slacking academically, my advisor knows. If I'm late, he'll call me." The school's very good partnerships with organizations such as the Greenwich Village Youth Council, New York University and Facing History and Ourselves support students' emotional and academic achievement, very well.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school has devised its own strategic planning tool to support its innovative approach to education and includes student and teacher outcomes. It is regularly updated with a description of progress towards long term goals, and changes in plan. However although this plan identifies goals, not all of these are quantifiable. For example, goals to help students improve their use of evidence to support discussions are a list of the actions staff will take, rather than focusing on outcomes. The school uses technology to track student progress and the success of interventions very effectively. This provides staff with a holistic picture of their students' achievement and emotional development, to support planning. The school's focus on individual student achievement, through the use of a portfolio curriculum and carefully planned rubrics is very effective in evaluating student progress. As a result, no student falls too far behind. The new data specialist and math leader is very effective in using data to track student performance rates class by class, with different teachers and across semesters. She uses this information to discuss how the curriculum and teaching can be adjusted immediately in order to improve achievement. This insightful approach is being shared with other subject leaders, so that similarly effective systems can be developed across the school. The principal has very high expectations for the whole school community and works tirelessly with his staff to develop and implement strategies for further improvement. The success of the school is seen in the progress students make from the time they enter the school.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Essex Street Academy	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score				X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?					X
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?				X	
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X	

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?				X	
2.2 focus on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area?				X	
2.3 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?				X	
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?				X	
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?				X	
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?					X
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?					X
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X	

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?				X	
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?				X	
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?					X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X	

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped