



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Future Leaders' Institute Charter School

84M861

**134 West 122nd Street
New York, NY 10027**

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Dates of review: April 20, 2007

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Future Leaders' Institute Charter School is a charter school that was accredited two years ago, having opened as a district kindergarten to 8th grade public school some eight years previously. Its mission is 'to expand opportunities for students who historically have had limited access to rigorous academic instruction, and to empower them to make informed, deliberate decisions so that they may lead socially responsible, productive lives'. The school currently serves around 300 students, the majority of whom are Black and come from the immediate area. Attendance is high in comparison with City and State schools, at over 95%. The school improved its performance on the state English language arts and mathematics tests between 2005-06 and 2006-07.

The most recent Charter School Renewal document was reviewed during this visit and any additional findings are reflected in this report.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and other leaders have established a clear vision for the school which is increasingly reflected in its practice.
- Staff development has a high priority in the school and has achieved considerable success in securing improvement.
- Over a comparatively short time, the school has secured improvements in tone and culture that have established a calm and stimulating climate for learning.
- The school is particularly good at developing students' self esteem and confidence.
- The curriculum is carefully planned and increasingly provides continuity of experience for students.
- The work of senior leaders, staff and students is characterized by high expectations.
- Data on the performance of different students is used increasingly well to identify areas of strength and aspects of the school's work that require improvement.
- The school has implemented clear organizational structures. Systems are clearly understood, operated consistently and to good effect.
- The confidence and trust between students and adults is clear and is backed by a high degree of mutual respect.
- Support for special education students is well planned and ensures that they make good progress.
- The school has a strong high school placement program in place.
- The board is strong with a diversified skill set.
- Parents are informed of board meetings and provided with a meeting calendar.
- The board committee evaluates school leadership and interviewed all departing staff.

What the school needs to improve

- Produce a medium/long term plan that maps the future development of the school and share the main objectives with staff, parents and students so that all parties know the timescale for what needs to be done.
- Improve the quality of teaching in the middle school department by leading and managing the staff more effectively and making better use of assessment data to inform planning.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching throughout the school so that all staff follow agreed procedures for the management of student behavior and students are given even better opportunities to develop as independent learners.

- Further develop the differentiation of planning so that the needs of higher achieving students are more effectively met.
- Explore ways to increase the involvement of parents in the progress and achievement of their children.
- Develop ways to offer students a voice in the future development of their school.
- Incorporate a parent or community member on the board of trustees.
- Further segregation of duties is needed to nurture internal controls.
- Develop proper inventory policy to address growing needs of the school.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

Since the school's registration as a charter school in June 2005, the principal and the chief operating officer have worked well in building a team who share their strong focus on ensuring a consistently high quality of teaching and learning. This has resulted in considerable improvement. The school has collated a good range of assessment data which has given it a clear picture of the patterns of student performance across classes and grades. It has made a good start in using this information to plan for improvement although, at present, this lacks sufficient detail to enable the school to track its progress sufficiently.

Relationships, teamwork and collaboration, particularly in grades K to 5 are good because of the level of discussion and evaluation that has been established, and because of the high expectations of students and staff that are set well by the principal. The school has identified the need to improve student learning further through planning lessons more effectively targeted at students' different needs and has made a good start in establishing consistency in this. Students are confident and articulate and, particularly when they are taught effectively, are well motivated. The school has recognized that there remains too much inconsistency in the level of stimulation or challenge provided for students, particularly those in the middle school grades, and those with higher attainment. The great majority of students enjoy coming to school and concentrate and collaborate well in those lessons where opportunities are planned to enable them to work together. Student motivation is seen both in their self confidence as learners and in the low attrition rate which, for this academic year is slightly lower than last year's 7%. Parents too are committed to the school, although the parents who are regularly involved and school leaders would like to see a much stronger partnership developing.

The FLI board has provided adequate oversight in most aspects of school's operation. The board demonstrates fair capacity and a mix of skill sets that has delivered for the school. The board may rethink how parents and community members can become more involved in the school that will provide the parents a true voice. The school has established good internal controls and policies to guide its day to day operation with some areas in need of minor improvement.

Overall, the school displays good financial outlook to meet its financial obligations. Parents hold positive opinion of the school and the programs offered by the school. However, there

are no formal avenues for the parents to bring their collective concerns to the school board.

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 student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school collects and makes effective use of a good range of student assessment information from published sources and from interim testing. Following the recognition that access to state or district testing information in October did not enable it to make best use of the information, the school has made a very good start in developing its own interim assessment model. From analysis, discussion of the implications of assessment data is used effectively, particularly by the principal and by staff developers, in comparing student achievement between classes and grades. This has helped in identifying achievement differences between the elementary grades and those in the middle school, and is particularly seen in the school's analysis of achievement in English language arts and in mathematics. As a result, the school has a good understanding of the performance of its lowest achieving students, as well as of where teaching is most successful. As yet, the school has yet to make full use of data in understanding the comparative performance of different groups of students, for example, boys and girls. This is particularly important in relation to the remaining behaviour issues in the school, which predominantly involve boys. Students who have the potential to be moved from level 1 into level 2, in contrast, are identified and interventions appropriately planned. A good understanding has been developed of the progress made by English language learners although the school recognizes that more use could be made of the information in analyzing the performance of students with different backgrounds. In a similar way, while the school has built up a good picture of the performance of special education and lower attaining students, it knows that there is as yet too little focus on students who achieve at higher levels.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Over a short period of time and particularly since becoming a charter school, the principal and the chief operating officer have placed considerable emphasis on improving the range of available data and in using this to identify aspects of its work that require improvement. The principal works very well in collaboration with staff developers, lead teachers and staff in evaluating student achievement, and in planning revisions to the intervention strategies that are in place. A strong focus of the school's efforts, for example, is in improving the progress of the lowest attaining students which has had a positive impact on their learning, particularly in the elementary grades. Effective tracking of the performance of students, particularly those at risk and those of lower attainment, has enabled the school to set targets for the achievement of these students which can be checked over the year. The school recognizes that a closer analysis of the comparative performance of groups by

gender and ethnicity, as well as of higher attaining students, has the potential to help it in identifying needs even more precisely.

The principal is very well supported by other staff in leadership positions in setting high expectations of what students will achieve and of how they will be supported by teachers. As a group, they have achieved a great deal in communicating this vision across to all the staff. Although some students have an understanding of their goals, this is neither consistent nor sufficiently specific. Parents who are involved with the school feel fully included and well informed about the progress that their children have made. The school has recognized the need to find ways to involve a much wider range of its parents so that they too can support the education of their children. A good start has been made in using student assessment information in identifying areas and goals for whole school improvement, although the comparatively informal nature of this combined with the absence of clear interim 'check points', makes it difficult for the school to identify the progress that is being made toward achieving its goals.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school has moved forward well in ensuring that its curriculum is balanced and that it reflects State and City requirements and demonstrate the school's increasing ability to identify curriculum development needs from student achievement data. The introduction of the Balanced Literacy program has led to consistency of teaching and expectation which, in turn, is well used in establishing and building teachers' understanding of their accountability. Focused professional development and the good use made of lead teachers have ensured that teaching is increasingly planned according to students needs. The school recognizes that this is better developed in the elementary grades than in the middle school, and has appropriate plans in place which have the potential to secure improvement. This is further enhanced by the high expectations that are very clearly set by the principal.

The recent development of computer based curriculum mapping is a perceptive development designed to assist teachers in refining planning points in relation to student success, as well as ensuring coherence in planning and the assessment of its effectiveness. The budget is very carefully tracked and has been well used in the acquisition of good quality resources and, as importantly, in appointing and deploying staff to positions in which their expertise can make a difference. The establishment of the 'morning meeting', focused on problem solving is a good example of this, particularly in the calm and concentrated start to each day which results. Students, in this and other activities, concentrate well and the emphasis which has been placed by the school on building respect and self esteem is seen in students' readiness to contribute to discussion in lessons where good opportunities for this are planned. Their commitment to the school is seen in the fact that they would like to be able to contribute more to its development through, for example, involvement in a 'school council'. The school has good systems in place to respond appropriately to student tardiness or absence and, together with students' clear enjoyment in coming to school, ensures that attendance is good.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school has developed its use of data, particularly at senior levels, and increasingly uses this to inform the identification and planning of professional development. In considering the appointment and allocation of staff, the principal demonstrates her very high expectations and well developed understanding of teachers' strengths in deciding where their skills can best be utilized. School leaders and staff developers have a good understanding of what works well, and of where improvements are required, that is derived from the discussions that take place following monitoring activities. The involvement of staff developers in observation allows interventions and development to be planned and targeted appropriately. Teachers value the support that comes from these opportunities, and describe the degree to which opportunities to observe each others' practice within and across grades has led to a developing understanding of expectation and practice.

The principal is very well respected by staff, students and parents for her high expectations and ability to take hard decisions. Teachers see her as an able professional who leads from the front, and this is enhanced by her availability and willingness to listen to a range of views. Teamwork is well established through regular meetings, and the input of senior staff and staff developers. The appointment of a new assistant principal, with an overview of the middle school grades, has already begun to make a difference to teachers' confidence in using data and her role following appointment will be to bring an even greater data focus to team meetings in these grades. Staff acknowledge the clear systems that have been put in place so that the school runs smoothly. Partnerships are well used in providing a good range of extended opportunities, such as in the involvement of social workers in after school activities.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school's improved use of data has enabled student progress to be understood more clearly and interventions planned accordingly. Practice testing, for example, gave the school information about different students' acquisition of their targets and led to modifications in unit planning. Appropriate use is made of data in grade meetings and is used effectively both in setting achievement targets and in identifying necessary interventions, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. The school recognizes that its focus on improving the progress of lower achieving students has, to a degree, reduced its efforts to raise higher achieving students' results even further.

The school has ensured that it has used data for student achievement appropriately in identifying aspects of its work that are effective and where improvement is required. Professional development and observational focus are both planned in relation to this good understanding. At present, and because whole-school goals are set within a one year framework and do not yet include interim targets, the school has difficulty in assessing the rate of progress made towards meeting planned objectives.

Quality Statement 6 – School’s Board has provided “effective” oversight and leadership as needed and is functioning in accordance with the agreed upon charter.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The Board is responsible for the overall direction and fiscal well being of the school. As such, the Board has the authority and duty to adopt policies and by-laws that are necessary to meet its statutory responsibilities and produce optimal academic results. Those administrative and daily operational responsibilities need to be delegated to principals, senior management/administrators, and board appointed officers to manage the school within the established policies. The principal senior administrators, and board appointed officers should then be held accountable for performance.

Future Leader Institute’s (FLI) board of trustees is functioning as stipulated by charter contract. The board is equipped with finance, accounting, fundraising, legal, and educational expertise to continue providing guidance in policy implementation. FLI’s board is composed of finance, education, human resources, development, grievance committees.

According to the board, its members are comfortable with financial information presented to them at the board meetings. The board conducts formal evaluation of the school leader. So far, no parent or community member sits on the board of trustees. The school is advised to facilitate channels to give parents a voice in school’s vision.

The board of trustees has been presented with sufficient financial, educational data and other relevant information during board meetings to make informed decisions and work collaboratively towards the school’s stated mission. The board approved budget is consistently monitored and compared to year-to-date expense, variance analyzed, and justifications provided by staff. The budget preparation process involves board members, teacher inputs, school leader, and financial officer. Finally, the board has successfully provided effective oversight in all aspects of school operations.

Quality Statement 7 – School has developed internal controls in place to detect and prevent financial fraud. School has written policies to guide ongoing operations and those policies are followed by school employees.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

FLI has adequate internal controls to prevent fraud but the school needs to improve the segregation of duties among its staff. FLI may assign one person to receive all credit card statements rather than statements arriving to separate individuals in the school. The school may also consider providing additional administrative help geared towards the fiscal area.

The school needs to adopt a feasible inventory policy to address the growing needs and conduct an inventory at least once a year. The school board may also consider associating a ceiling with the petty cash. A sampling of invoices, purchase orders, and proof of payment was conducted during the site visit. FLI has proper documentation in place and school staff follows written procedures. School is following policies adopted by the board of trustees.

Quality Statement 8 – Based on the most recent financial statements, school is in sound fiscal condition.

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

A charter school should be able to operate with an annual budget that reflects the expected revenue and expenses for the fiscal year. Since the revenue stream for charter schools tend to be based upon the number of students served (per pupil revenue) and the State and Federal grant (Title funding, etc...) funding, a continued and growing negative net balance poses threat to school's stability and the ability to fulfill its short and long-term financial obligations.

Based on FLI's financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2006, FLI is in good financial condition. The school spent 91% of its funds on educational programs and 5.6% on administrative expenses. The school continues to enjoy a healthy financial outlook with a strong ability to meet its short term financial obligations with minimal debt/liability on its books.

Quality Statement 9 – School has the structure to integrate parents and community partners in the school.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Parents expressed satisfaction with FLI's rigorous curriculum, weekly progress report, discipline, and the way school challenges its students. Parents receive communication in various language(s) including information regarding board meetings. Some parents felt that they would like to see the homework package come back to them with some comments from the school. Parents expressed desire to see more sports opportunities at the school. FLI has various planned parent awareness events and meetings opportunities in place to encourage continued parent and community participation. Overall, parents hold a positive opinion of FLI.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Future Leaders Institute Charter School

∅ ✓ +

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 student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 			X
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school 			X
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	
Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and 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 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	
Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.		X	
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	

Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student’s and group of students’ outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other’s classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.	X		
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan’s interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	
Quality Statement 6 – School’s Board has provided “effective” oversight and leadership as needed and is functioning in accordance with the agreed upon charter.	∅	✓	+
6.1 The Board size, structure and composition are appropriate. The membership is diverse (G/S/E) and compliments a broad skill set.		X	
6.2 Board functions as stipulated by contract, and is a well-functioning organization.		X	
6.3 Board has adopted and communicated the whistleblower policy with staff members.			X
6.4 Board has provided effective oversight in operational, fiscal, academic, hiring & firing (as appropriate) issues of the school.			X
6.5 Board conflicts (if any) were resolved in timely fashion and had no effect on school operations.			X
6.6 Board evaluates partner organization at least once a year. OCS was notified of any changes in partnership agreement.	n/a		
6.7 Board has been responsive to both parent and school staff concerns/complaints (if any)			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 6		X	
Quality Statement 7 – School has developed internal controls in place to detect and prevent financial fraud. School has written policies to guide ongoing operations and those policies are followed by school employees.	∅	✓	+
7.1 School has a comprehensive financial control system in place. Check signing, procurement, inventory controls, bank reconciliation, travel reimbursement, investment, petty cash, conflict of interest, vacation and sick leave, bonus relocation, etc. policy is in place.		X	

7.2 School has segregated staff duties to prevent and detect fraud.		X	
7.3 School is consistently following its adopted financial procedures for requisition approval, certification of funds and placing of orders for goods.			X
7.4 School's employees are familiar with school's established financial procedures.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 7		X	
Quality Statement 8* – Based on the most recent financial statements, school is in sound fiscal condition.		Ø	✓ +
8.1 School's total educational expense / total expense ratio is above 70% for this fiscal year.			X
8.2 School's administrative ratio is under 30% for this fiscal year.			X
8.3 School's current ratio is greater than or equal to 2.0.		X	
8.4 School's debt to asset ratio is less than or equal to 1.0.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 8			X
Quality Statement 9 – School has structure to integrate parents and community partners in the school.		Ø	✓ +
9.1 School has a parent organization or a parent teacher organization.		X	
9.2 School has special events for parents to meet, discuss issues and socialize with each other.			X
9.3 Parents are informed of the time and location of the open Board meetings.			X
9.4 Newsletters are sent in all predominant languages of the neighborhood to encourage parent participation and eliminate cultural and language barriers.			X
9.5 Parent handbook stipulates the appeals process should a conflict arise.		X	
9.6 Has a clear idea of how the pupil has improved since attending this school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 9		X	

*Note on Statement 8: School's current year in operation and other extenuating circumstances (facilities acquisition, capital renovation, etc..) will be taken into account while assigning a grade.