



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Democracy Prep Charter School

**222 West 134 Street
New York, NY 10030**

Principal: Seth Andrew

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Currently in its first year of operation, the Democracy Prep Charter School is situated in the Harlem section of Manhattan. It has enrolled 118 students in grade 6, with a plan to expand annually until reaching full capacity as a grade 6 through 12 school for up to 650 students.

The present demographic structure shows that 70% of the students are Black and 30% Hispanic. Eleven percent are English language learners. Twenty one percent are special education students. Upon entering the school 80% of the students were more than one grade level behind expectation, but a considerable number have made up to three grades progress during the course of the school year. Attendance is currently running at 95.5%, which is above the City average for this grade.

Student attrition is not yet known, but the school feels it may be significant, since evidence shows that many of the current students are not on track to meet the school's requirement for promotion to 7th grade. Even if they achieve the necessary standard during summer school and are not held over, there is a concern that parents may wish to remove their children because of the high demands for excellence placed upon them, though the school hopes that most will continue to support the clear vision it articulates.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school produces detailed data on individuals, cohorts and subject analysis that is used to drive instruction.
- The principal and all the staff are committed to the vision of the school and to making it a success.
- There is a positive commitment to admitting special education students on the same terms as general education students.
- The implementation of a behavior plan that promotes the positive as well as delivering consequences for the unacceptable has had positive impact.
- The school promotes high levels of active participation in lessons by students.
- Teachers are supported through the daily provision of three hours planning and preparation time.
- Individualized support is given to teachers to promote the development of their expertise.
- Effective procedures to address absence and tardiness have been implemented.
- The school maintains good contacts with home through the weekly report card.
- There are clear rubrics for judging the effectiveness of the principal and faculty.
- HR files are well maintained and contain most essential information.
- A good check signing policy is in place.
- The school's hiring process is very thorough.

What the school needs to improve

- As the school develops, the need for more effective delegation and the creation of clear job descriptions should be addressed as a priority.
- Opportunities for teachers to observe the best practice in other schools, both charter and public, should be developed.
- The introduction of technology as a tool for teaching and learning could add another dimension to the work of the school.
- A wider scope in the program of electives would help broaden the opportunities for students to gain from a broader curriculum.
- A program of physical education and the development of specialist science facilities would help provide a more varied curriculum.
- As space becomes available, the development of the library facilities would support individual research and learning by students.

- School needs to further segregate some financial functions.
- Board needs to get involved more closely in school's execution of policies that were set forth.
- Educate all board members to interpret basic financial information presented at board meetings.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

In its first year of operation, Democracy Prep is a charter school that is reflecting high ideals for its students, not only in terms of preparing them for a college education, but also in making them effective citizens. It shows a commitment to admitting students who are behind grade expectation at the time of enrollment, 80% of whom are actually more than one grade level below expectation. Similarly, the principal has sought actively to admit special education students so that 21% of the current enrollment has individualized education plans. Wherever possible, these students are integrated into the general education classes and out of individual resource room provision.

Students are expected to commit themselves to an extended day, nightly homework and Saturday school. They are well supported in this by the very committed staff, who are available after school until 9.00 p.m. to provide help if needed via their cell phones. All the staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the ideals of the school.

The school is full and under the procedures for open enrollment there were well over 400 applicants for the 118 places in the 6th grade for next September. Parents are made well aware of the high demands that will be made on their children and in fact, at the moment, many students are on course for being held over because they will not meet the requirements for promotion. The effects on attrition are yet to be seen.

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 well developed.

The school is data rich and uses the information it gains from this to maximize the effectiveness of instruction and individual student progress. On entry to the school a baseline assessment is created using the Stanford-10 test. Similar testing is then undertaken in weeks 12, 24 and 36 of the school year so that clear value-added judgments can be made and student progress measured. Data identifies grade and individual progress levels and an Excel spreadsheet for each group shows individual performance and rate of growth. An item analysis enables teachers to see, at glances, which curriculum areas have been mastered and which need to be re-taught within the groups in their classes. This information has been supplemented at the mid-point with assessments undertaken through a consultancy which looks at performance of individuals in tests closely aligned to the New York standards. There is an expectation that teachers will be adept in manipulating performance data and professional development has been provided in this prior to the start of the school year. Teachers are responsible for keeping their data up to date and presenting this to the principal on a regular basis.

Because of the very limited demographics there has not been any breakdown of the data by ethnicity and there is an expectation that irrespective of social, ethnic or linguistic background students will perform at a high level. However, data on the performance of

special education students is analyzed with care. Wherever possible these students are taught in general education classes, even when their individualized education plans have specified resource room if possible. Nine students with special education needs joined the school last September. The evidence shows that many students have made rapid progress in their learning, some making up to three grade levels progress within this first school year. The school is an active member of the New York charter schools group and maintains close links with other charter schools which foster similar ideals. It is intended to make a detailed comparison with the performance of Democracy Prep students with those of other similar schools when such data becomes available, primarily from Stanford-10 results.

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 well developed.

Using the data obtained from the results of the Stanford -10 tests taken in week 0, there is detailed curriculum planning and benchmarking. Working backwards from the information on performance, teachers broke the year down into six weekly teaching units, and weekly and daily lesson planning. These have been amended in the light of the analysis of the data subsequently gathered from testing, including item analysis which reflects mastery or otherwise of individual curriculum elements. As a result teaching is focused on identified needs of groups and individual students. The principal and coaches have worked actively to support this practice.

The information gathered creates clear goals for each student, classroom, grade level and subject. The performance of students who are not making sufficient progress is highlighted in red in the teacher’s spreadsheets. This at-a-glance identification means that students can be supported from the outset. Where there are learning problems, such as in developing reading skills, there are programs to provide support. For example, two teachers are qualified to deliver the Wilson program to develop phonetic skills. As a result, such students can make good progress in the wider curriculum. However, at the moment there are a few issues of compliance with the special education regulations that the school will need to address. From the outset the school made its high expectations clear to parents and pupils, supported by a home visit by the principal to make this explicit. Parents are encouraged to be partners in the education of their children through a weekly individual report card that is sent home, showing not only the outcomes of the week, but also providing a channel for wider communication. In this way parents can work with the school leadership and teachers in putting student progress at the very heart of the life of the school. This is supported in school by an effective behavior program that gives good rewards for the positive and effective sanctions for the negative.

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 well developed.

Detailed work undertaken in curriculum analysis ensures that it is fully aligned with City and State requirements. The curriculum is currently hindered by the lack of space and

resources that impacts directly on provision of physical education, science and the use of technology. Similarly, the current range of electives is rather limited. However, the role of civics, reflecting the wider vision of the school is a very strong element of the curriculum.

Teachers are held accountable for the progress of their students. A rubric is used to create an evaluative assessment of their performance (including a self-assessment) and in conjunction with student performance in the trimester exams, goals are set for teacher performance. They respond with enthusiasm and commitment.

The budget focuses as much as possible on identified needs, so that teachers can make requests for things they need to improve instruction and outcomes and the principal tries to meet requests. Where possible teachers are placed with classes with which they are likely to show most success. This is, in part, determined by the regular analysis of teacher strengths and areas for improvement. Similarly, scheduling reflects grouping students' strengths as reflected in data, though these groupings are flexible and students are not necessarily aware of them.

Most students are actively engaged in learning and active participation is a strong feature in class. The school seeks to ensure that 80% of students will seek to answer 80% of the questions asked by teachers. Attendance and addressing tardiness are high priorities. Punctuality is measured to the second, with strong consequences for not being on time. Any absence results in a phone call home by 8:30. In this way the school is able to demonstrate attendance of 95.5%, considerably above the average for the City.

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 well developed.

Prior to opening the school received around 3,000 résumés for the 20 teaching posts and so the school was able to ensure that those appointed are of high quality, but that they also reflect the ideals and vision of the school. In order to allow them to meet the requirements to implement data driven instruction, professional development was given to ensure that all teachers were comfortable with the requirements prior to the school opening. Professional development, often led by members of the faculty, is seen as right for teachers and forms an important element of the three hour staff meeting held every Friday. It is also anticipated that around an hour of the three hours given daily for planning and preparation will include some kind of collaborative developmental activity, such as intervisitation. This is actively encouraged and in every classroom there is a form for teachers to complete when they have observed a colleague, offering comments on strengths and areas for development. Teachers receive individual professional support based on identified needs to help them maximize their effectiveness. Currently, however, the opportunities to observe best practice in other schools are rather limited.

The principal, the Director of Academic Support and the Director of School Culture and Literacy frequently undertake observations and comments help to inform the trimester evaluations of teacher performance and professional goal setting. There is a strong team culture running through the school and teachers plan and evaluate goals together, well supported by the Directors. However, there is currently only a limited amount of delegation from the principal and as the school expands there is an acceptance that this will need to be addressed if the school is to perform at its best.

At the moment, because of the highly focused curriculum and demands for high quality input, the school has not sought to develop links with external development and support services.

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 well developed.

The school has clear goals and expected outcomes. These are measured carefully during the course of the school year. Similarly, the effectiveness of the principal and faculty are measured, each by rubric. There are clear expectations of improvements in performance across the curriculum, and in cohort and individual achievement, which will be measured through performance on the Stanford-10 tests. Value added measures in successive tests provide detailed evidence of individual progress and areas for improvement in meeting goals.

Throughout the year, diagnostic assessment is used to measure progress and outcomes. It is also a tool for measuring the effectiveness of teaching, measured through item analysis. The effectiveness of teaching is also in part measured through the progress made by students from their initial baseline. The school has so much information on individual students and is so adept at manipulating it, that there is a lot of flexibility in grouping and planning as the year progresses. Similarly, instruction can be amended in the light of the item analysis, moving on from concepts that are grasped while revisiting those shown to be problematic.

At the heart of everything the school does is the concentration on challenge, academic rigor and pace, so that students can make up lost ground in terms of gaining academic success. The use of data begins as soon as a student enters the school and from that point is key to the many good practices that are easily observable. By amending instruction, goals and expected outcomes in light of the emerging picture that unfolds during the course of the year, the school ensures that the challenge it has set itself, and its students in terms of gaining college placement, can be achieved.

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.

Democracy Prep Charter School's (DPCS) board of trustees is functioning as stipulated by charter contract. The board is equipped with legal, non profit, finance, public relations, and

education expertise to continue providing guidance in policy implementation. The board consists of academics, finance, governance, development, and facilities committees. It does not appear that *all* board members are comfortable with basic financial information presented to them at the board meetings. The board may consider having a workshop (the CPA on the board for instance may hold it) to educate board members regarding basic financial information. The board conducts formal evaluation of the school leader each school year. The board understands the significance of having parent engagement in the school's vision but so far, there are no parents that sit on the board.

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. However, OCS questions presentation of financial information since the school's CFO (or other fiscal staff) did not attend regular board meetings. 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 school's chief financial officer. Although the board has provided adequate oversight in most aspects of school operations, it is urged to consider taking a more active role that will lead to stronger oversight in coming months. Moreover, the board needs to ensure that the school based staff are empowered to carry on their duties in accordance with the job description for which they were hired. DPCS is also expected to manage the minor founder's syndrome (common among newly founded ventures) evidenced during the school visit. The school board was given a verbal brief by OCS' staff at a meeting held at Tweed.

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.

DPCS maintains adequate internal controls to prevent fraud. The school might want to consider not giving possession of physical checks to any staff member(s) who is also a check signer. Any back account or credit card user may not receive the bank statements directly but rather have them delivered to other fiscal or non fiscal related employee to maintain segregation of duties. The school is also advised to tag all assets. A sampling of invoices, purchase orders, and proof of payment was conducted during the site visit. No material weakness was found. DPCS has proper documentation in place and the 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.

DPCS is in its first year of operation and will provide its audited financial statements on November 1, 2007. At that point, OCS will analyze the expenses incurred on education and administrative expenses as well as school's financial outlook.

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 hold good opinion about the school in this category. They praised the school's weekly progress reports, reward 'dollars' and trips, and bilingual communication. Parents also acknowledged their children's improvement in reading, math and history. The school needs to create avenues to incorporate parental input into the program. In the absence of a parent board member, a PTA or any other parent organization, there is a vacuum pertaining to parents' voice in the school. DPCS has various planned parent awareness events and meetings opportunities in place to encourage continued parent and community participation.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Democracy Prep Charter School	∅	✓	+
Quality Score			

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			
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.		N/A	
8.2 School’s administrative ratio is under 30% for this fiscal year.		N/A	
8.3 School’s current ratio is greater than or equal to 2.0.		N/A	
8.4 School’s debt to asset ratio is less than or equal to 1.0.		N/A	
Overall score for Quality Statement 8		N/A	
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.