



# Elevating Educational Excellence at P.S. 249

The Caton School with Achievement Teams

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P.S. 249, The Caton School

Brooklyn, New York

*How pairing Achievement Teams with immediate student-facing deliberate practice exponentially elevated teacher clarity and performance in a high-poverty Brooklyn elementary school, bridging the typical performance gap between novice and seasoned educators.*

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Led by Principal Dr. Elisa Brown and Assistant Principal Ana DeJesus, P.S. 249 (or The Caton School) is a nationally recognized Blue Ribbon School located in Brooklyn, New York. The school serves a diverse population of 700 students, with 25% English Language Learners (ELL) and 25% students with disabilities. English as a New Language (ENL) classrooms are led by teachers certified to teach English to speakers of other languages. It operates in a Title 1, high-poverty environment and has earned accolades such as recognition from the National Center for Urban School Transformation and the America's Best Schools Award. The school is proud of its rich offering of art forms including art, music, dance, and theater.

- 51% Hispanic, with a majority from Mexico, and others from various parts of Central America, South America, and the Caribbean.
- A few students from South American countries like Brazil and Bolivia.
- Black Caribbean students from Haiti, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Panama.
- Post-pandemic, an influx of students from Bangladesh has added to the school's diversity.
- A very diverse staff representing different parts of Latin America, the Caribbean, and the U.S.


## CHALLENGE

Before Achievement Teams, P.S. 249 grappled with a **lack of structure or defined approach to data analysis**. Assistant Principal DeJesus remembers, "We didn't have a structure. We were going by whatever we got, the major [structure] being the DOE's PLC system." Despite being a high-performing Title 1 school, challenges in teacher clarity and standards alignment hindered teachers' ability to consistently meet the diverse needs of its student population. Additionally, like many schools and districts across the country, teacher turnover rates meant an urgent need to upskill first-year and less experienced teachers. To **propel student achievement and leadership capacity**, Principal Brown, Assistant Principal DeJesus, and the P.S. 249 staff **fully committed to the Achievement Teams framework** to **enhance teacher clarity and performance**, thereby **ensuring equitable outcomes for students**.

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**Schools That Work**

**P.S. 249 The Caton School**  
Public, Urban  
Grades PK-5  
Brooklyn, NY



**What makes this a SCHOOL THAT WORKS ^**  
At P.S. 249 in Brooklyn, New York, about half of the student body are from Spanish-speaking countries—but what might be considered a language challenge for some has been turned into an opportunity here. The school's dual-language Spanish program starts in kindergarten. Nearly every teacher is trained to teach English as a second language, and consistent with best practices in ELL, standards remain high despite understandable gaps in language comprehension. Through a robust math curriculum, engaging science days, and a new way of doing professional development that frames classrooms as teaching labs, the neighborhood school not only brings out the best in kids—it has become a high performer over the past decade.

Featured as one of [Edutopia's "Schools That Work,"](#) Dr. Brown and team have created an environment that emphasizes honoring differences, embracing mistakes, and reaching for excellence for students and staff alike.



“Achievement Teams build capacity, and then that multiplies across the building... You really are creating more teacher leaders across the building.”

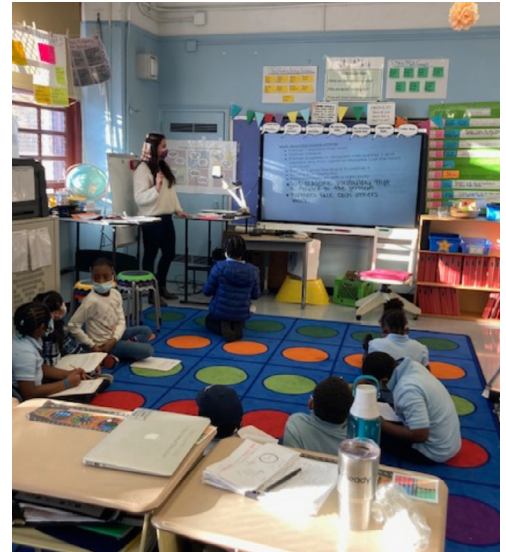
—Dr. Elisa Brown, Principal

## IMPLEMENTATION

Principal Dr. Brown and Assistant Principal Ana DeJesus, along with their team, first heard about Achievement Teams after a teacher returned from the 2017 Visible Learning Conference. Advanced Collaborative Solutions’ Steve Ventura is an annual guest and presenter at the Visible Learning Conference, as his work greatly emphasizes John Hattie’s Visible Learning research, which synthesizes over 2,100 meta-studies into what works best for learning in schools. Absolutely adamant that the school’s leaders look into Steve Ventura and this framework, this passionate teacher didn’t have to do much convincing. Brown and DeJesus knew their school needed a structured approach to data analysis and had a deep desire to align instructional strategies with high-impact practices.

The adoption process involved comprehensive training for all staff members over multiple days. Through the Advanced Collaborative Solutions Achievement Teams certification trainings, Ventura helped uncover the collective efficacy of the P.S. 249 teaching team, fostering a foundation ripe for collaboration and positive staff culture. To ensure consistency and sustainability of the framework, Ventura returns to The Caton School every school year to offer a content refresher, observe, provide feedback, and action plan.

The school implemented Achievement Teams during dedicated time slots on Mondays and Tuesdays, but these weren’t your typical after-school meetings. Mondays were dedicated to data analysis and discussing high-impact strategies. Tuesdays were used for “labsite work.” Dr. Brown shares that while “meetings were after school, teachers pulled students who were already part of the after-school program. What was great about that is it’s low-stakes and non-threatening. You can make mistakes. Colleagues can give immediate feedback to you. You can see your more experienced teachers practicing. At times, just by watching a colleague, another teacher will try something and then take it back to their own classroom effectively.” This one-two punch of the Achievement Teams protocol with immediate student-facing deliberate practice (“labsite work”) achieves several goals simultaneously: teachers engage in deliberate practice, teachers experience best practices modeled by colleagues, and students in need of intervention receive additional targeted support.



*Students and teachers get valuable extra practice during labsite work.*

## TARGET OUTCOMES

- Improve student performance in Math and ELA.
- Enhance teacher clarity, aligning teaching points and success criteria to standards.
- Cultivate a collaborative culture, enhancing the school's capacity to analyze data effectively.
- Propel new teacher growth to ensure equitable academic outcomes.
- Foster a culture of continuous improvement and professional development.



## RESULTS

The transformative impact of Achievement Teams at P.S. 249 is evident. Some key outcomes include:

- **Excellence in Student Academic Achievement:** Most recently, The Caton School was the top math performer in their district in the 2022–23 school year, with 76% of students proficient or higher, an increase of 15 percentage points over the year before. Several years into Achievement Teams and labsite work, The Caton School received a Blue Ribbon Award for Exemplary Performance from the U.S. Department of Education in 2021. Last year, the school earned a 2023 America's Best School Award from the National Center for Urban School Transformation.
- **Equitable Student Outcomes:** After switching to an English as a New Language (ENL) model, the majority of kindergartners who start at the school with little or no English reach proficiency by the third or fourth grade and test out of language learner status. A year after adopting Achievement Teams, P.S. 249 was named a Reward School for two years in a row (2018–19) for high academic achievement—with no significant gaps between subgroups—by the New York Department of Education. Not only are multilingual students thriving academically, but they are reaching fluency and moving into regular classrooms at a much higher rate than before.
- **Consistent and Effective Data Analysis Across Grade Levels and Classrooms:** The structured approach to data analysis and instructional planning continues to contribute to sustained academic excellence, culminating in the prestigious Blue Ribbon School designation.
- **An Innovative Labsite Work Model that Ensures Deliberate Practice:** Labsites emerged as a linchpin for teacher professional development, offering immediate feedback and a safe space for practice. DeJesus reflects, "Often what we do is we observe and give feedback, but there's not time to practice or a safe place to practice. This is the key to why our new teachers improve so quickly. Every year, when we ask each teacher the most helpful thing, it's labsite work."



**KINDERGARTEN LAB SITE Afterschool Workshop**

When P.S. 249 grade-level teams of teachers work together on skills and strategies to help them improve their practice every week, everyone benefits. Watch the story in this Edutopia [video](#).



“The consistency and the way we do things across grades built coherence. We look at data the same way. We pair high-impact strategies with labsites where children can be in PD. This close proximity to PD significantly enhanced the impact teachers had on students.”

—Dr. Elisa Brown, Principal

## MOVING FORWARD

The present is already bright at P.S. 249, and the future is even brighter. While the school is adjusting to new schedule constraints that have impacted their ability to follow the same Monday-Tuesday cadence described above, they continue to think flexibly and adjust while maintaining a laser focus on student achievement. As the team sets their sights higher, DeJesus notes that “P.S. 249 views Achievement Teams as a key component in its journey toward 100% proficiency in math and ELA. The structured approach is expected to fortify the school's culture of learning, ensuring that every student receives the best education possible.”



*Students in need of intervention receive data-driven support during Achievement Teams follow-up labsite work.*

## ABOUT ADVANCED COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS AND ACHIEVEMENT TEAMS

Advanced Collaborative Solutions (ACS) is a professional development and consulting group that provides consulting services to schools, districts, and non-profit organizations globally, specializing in instructional leadership, collaboration, assessment, and goal setting. Achievement Teams™ is an experiential and effective four-step protocol developed by ACS centered around Collective Teacher Efficacy — a shared belief that educators can have a greater impact on student achievement when they work together. Within Achievement Teams, educators look at student data to make decisions about instruction and teaching practices that need to shift to best meet student needs. Achievement Teams ensure continuous improvement and better student outcomes by providing a structure for teachers to collaboratively reflect, identify areas of need, and select optimal instructional approaches to respond to those needs.

