



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Park Slope Education Complex

Middle School 88

**544 7 Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11215**

Principal: Ailene Altman Mitchell

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Reviewer: Jill Berman

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Park Slope Education Complex at Middle School 88, located in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn, is a three-year middle school that serves 943 students in grades 6 through 8. It also draws students from the diverse multicultural communities of Sunset Park, Red Hook, and downtown Brooklyn. The proportion of students (70%) known to be Title 1 eligible is slightly lower than similar schools but higher than city schools. The school is organized into three vertical theme-based houses, namely the School of Media Arts and Technology, the School for Medical and Health Careers, and the School for Integrated Studies through the Arts. Each house is of relatively equal size and occupies one floor of the building with a unique color scheme to set it apart. Students usually remain in one house for three years.

Sixty-one percent of the students are Hispanic, 16% are Black, 13% are Asian and 9% are White. The remaining 1% comes from other backgrounds. In 2006 the school's attendance rate of 94% was higher than both similar and city schools. It is the only barrier-free school in district 15 and special education students comprise 9% of its population, a higher percentage than in similar or citywide schools. Thirteen percent of the students are English language learners.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides strong leadership and effectively communicates her vision to all members of the school community.
- The school uses hard and soft data to monitor student progress with regularity.
- The school utilizes its three theme-based houses to actively engage students in the learning process.
- Common planning periods provide a dynamic structure enabling teachers to collaborate about curriculum integration, effective instructional strategies and student performance.
- The school promotes interdisciplinary collaboration and integrated curricula to enhance student learning.
- The school effectively utilizes learning lab sites to enable teachers to share, learn and implement exemplary instructional practices.
- The school provides a variety of training and supports for less experienced teachers.
- Members of the school community are united and share a common understanding for the need to improve student achievement.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop strategies that enable all students to make consistent progress.
- Continue to find ways to involve more parents in discussions about their children's achievement.
- Continue to provide training so that all teachers are comfortable utilizing data to identify students' needs.
- Continue to provide professional development for differentiated instruction.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Since taking over the school in the fall of 2005 the principal has provided purposeful leadership by focusing on two main concerns, utilizing data to improve student achievement and enabling her staff to develop instructional practices that enhance student performance. High expectations are conveyed to staff, students and parents. She has sharpened the academic focus in each of the theme-based houses and created structures that make them learning communities where teachers know their students well. Common planning periods allow grade level teachers in each house to jointly monitor student progress, and provide targeted students with additional support. The school has a welcoming culture in which everyone feels valued and both students and staff are glad to be there.

While students have made some gains in achievement and, in most subject areas, somewhat surpass similar schools, the school is keenly aware that increased progress must be made for all its students. There is a feeling that the current emphasis on the more effective use of data analysis as a tool for instructional decision-making will lead to better student performance. The school's internal self-assessment records realistically reflect the school's strengths as well as the areas in need of improvement.

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 effectively uses multiple sources of data generated by the Princeton Review, Gains report, State and City assessments, practice tests and monthly school-wide examinations in each subject. Teachers also review such qualitative measures as class work, homework and reading response journals to evaluate on-going student performance. This year demographics, perceptions data and surveys are being used to get a clearer picture of the impact of the school's policies and practices on learning. A data team has been established and is correlating and analyzing data in more meaningful ways. For example, progress in English language arts is now correlated with social studies performance. This allows teachers in each discipline to determine which skills and strategies need to be reinforced in their respective classes. Teachers are being trained to use these analyses to guide instructional decision-making.

Special education students and English language learners are being more closely monitored this year in order to improve their progress. Male Hispanics are another focus. In order to improve English language arts proficiency for this group of students more action-oriented books are now being used in order to better motivate and engage them. Formative assessments have shown that this strategy has resulted in improved performance. Data are disaggregated by individual students, houses, grades, subject areas and special categories of concern. Comparisons are made within and across

houses. The data team created prediction tables to track expected versus actual progress. Other measures such as attendance rates, the number of students taking Regents and the percentage of honor roll students are examined to gauge the school's progress. The process of data collection and analysis is evolving and the principal and staff are already seeing how useful it is in monitoring student achievement. Moreover, formative assessment scores show which students are making progress from month to month.

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.

The school effectively uses data collection and analysis as a basis for setting instructional goals, developing more appropriate structures and practices, shaping its professional development program and identifying interventions that will improve student achievement. The principal and her cabinet, which is composed of assistant principals and coaches, examine the current state of student progress, project a desired state and then develop strategies that will help students reach the desired benchmarks. Information is shared with teacher leaders and the staff. Teachers are completely involved in collaborative planning and their suggestions and concerns are an important part of the decision-making process. The school pays particular attention to raising the achievement level of groups of students who may have made slower progress such as English language learners, special education students and students on levels 1 and 2 and has developed intervention strategies to accelerate their progress. The school is now aware that it does not do enough to develop strategies that would move more students from level 3 to 4.

High expectations are conveyed to students and caregivers who are regularly informed of the progress being made. Students are involved in creating learning rubrics in order to understand the elements that lead to higher achievement. Curriculum nights draw a large number of parents who get a chance to meet with their children's teachers and learn about the curriculum and expectations in each class. Although parents and caregivers are welcomed as partners in improving their children's performance many find it difficult to take time from work to come to school to discuss matters of concern. A dynamic parent coordinator strives to communicate with parents so they can be kept abreast of their child's progress. The school is committed to finding ways in addition to scheduling some events for both day and evening to engage more parents as partners and to increase parental involvement.

The school also has university partners (Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, the Center for Environmental Research of Columbia University and the City College math project) who are closely involved in the instructional planning process. The school is a site for an action research project aimed at improving instruction in mathematics and accelerating student progress in this area.

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 with some well-developed features.

The school uses innovative approaches for expanding possibilities within curricular areas so that these have greater relevance and interest for the diverse student population. While all curricula are aligned with State or City mandates, the school uses flexibility in developing its programs. For example, one of this year's instructional initiatives, in collaboration with Columbia's Center for Environmental Research and Conservation, is to integrate holistic concepts of ecology across disciplines and houses. Twice a year, students engage in an Integrated Projects Week where they present authentic ecology-driven exit projects based on inquiry-based, integrated curriculum approaches. Both students and staff are wildly enthusiastic about this exciting way of learning and correlate it to improved achievement levels.

The curriculum is regularly adjusted for students in response to needs identified through the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. For instance, curriculum mapping in social studies revealed that certain topics needed to be included in the grade 6 curriculum so that sufficient time would be available in grades 7 and 8 to teach the required units. This finding prompted the school to shift the curriculum for all three grades. This change has enabled students to improve their achievement levels in this discipline.

The workshop model used in literacy and mathematics and other classes has enabled teachers to better differentiate their instruction when conducting individual conferences and teaching mini-lessons. While teachers are becoming more comfortable and proficient in differentiating instruction they still need support in this area.

Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are made with the objective of improving student achievement. For example, teacher leaders were created in each grade to improve the level of instruction and student performance. Formative assessments have indicated that these measures have had a positive impact.

Student attendance is high both because of the rewards such as pizza parties and special recognition that students receive as well as the interventions that are in place when students are absent. It is also because students like being at this school where they are known and respected by staff.

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 with some well-developed features.

The principal selects staff who "are passionate about their subject, love kids and understand the special needs of middle school students, have the capacity use data to develop and revise plans and have the propensity to learn through professional development." The vast majority of teachers has been hired in the past few years. The teachers feel that a "culture of cooperation" exists and they feel supported well in their efforts. Recently, the school has developed a good reputation as a place "where teachers want to work" because creativity is nurtured and best practices are turn-keyed. Several teachers indicated that they sought transfers to this school based on its reputation. Professional development is differentiated based on teachers' needs. New teachers are given buddies in addition to the support they get from coaches and teacher leaders. Consultants from Teachers College and City College, coaches and teacher leaders conduct lesson labs. and then help teachers to implement best practices. Teachers make inter-visitations that are followed by debriefings. Because of these practices, the school is a mentor school for literacy and mathematics instruction. On-going training in the analysis

and utilization of data is provided. This year teachers of special education and English language learners have received special training and have restructured their curricula and adopted instructional practices aimed at improving performance. It is hoped that year-end test results will indicate the success of these measures. Interim assessments already indicate that these measures have had a positive impact on achievement.

Structures and processes, such as common planning time, provide rich opportunities for collaboration and allow staff to closely monitor student progress. In general, there is good communication among all constituents, and systems are in place that provide an accurate picture of how well the school is promoting student achievement. The principal is the driving force in this process and she demonstrates a significant capacity to manage continuous improvement.

The school has recently augmented the number and quality of school partnerships. Students in each house are provided with rich learning experiences to enhance their in-school learning. For example, some students in the School for Medical and Health Careers are serving as fellows in the New York Academy of Medicine's Junior Fellows Program where they are doing research about specific diseases along with medical researchers. University connections serve to improve instructional practices. Other agencies are aligned around adolescent development needs such as recreation or counseling.

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 recognizes that it must accelerate the learning for each and every student in addition to those who have been identified as most needy. The school has begun to expand the quality and types of comparisons it makes in order that each student in every category and group is monitored in terms of progress being made. It is using monthly assessments in each subject to monitor student progress and, when necessary, to modify instructional strategies and plans. For example, major changes in the sequencing of units in mathematics and science were made as a result of reviewing assessment data and meeting with teachers in each discipline. The principal and cabinet consistently review data from all available sources in order to determine whether the school is meeting its benchmarks.

The Comprehensive Education Plan sets forth realistic yet challenging goals. As the collection, analysis and utilization of data become more embedded in the school's processes the school has moved forward in its goal to improve student performance. Reflection and self-review are essential elements and strengths of the school's culture. The principal and her staff are committed to expanding their knowledge and use of effective instructional practices that improve student learning. The school is well poised to use its growing ability to utilize summative and formative assessments in order to flexibly alter instructional practices, structures and policies to achieve its goal of moving all students to higher levels of achievement.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Park Slope Education Complex (MS 88)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

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	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

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	