



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Fort Hamilton School

Public School / Intermediate school 104

**9115 5th Avenue
Brooklyn,
NY 11209**

Principal: Marie DiBella

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Reviewer: Chip Morrison

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Located primarily in an historic, early 20th-century building in the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn, Public School/Intermediate School 104, the Fort Hamilton School, serves 1280 students in kindergarten through grade 8. Of these, approximately 55% are White, 23% Hispanic, 16% Asian, and 6% Black. The school does not receive Title I funding. About 10% of students are classified as English language learners. The school has a growing number of transient students, newly arrived immigrants, and children from the nearby Army base who often attend the school for a year or less.

The school has one self-contained special education classroom at kindergarten, and a collaborative team teaching classroom for second graders. Another group of special education students, while not officially on the school's roll, are mainstreamed in general education classrooms. Attendance runs at approximately 94%, which is about the same as similar schools, and somewhat above the City average. Kindergarten and all but four first-grade classrooms are located in a more modern building several blocks away.

In addition to the principal, the core leadership team consists of three assistant principals and a coach for mathematics. Teacher turnover is relatively high, although no higher than City averages, and only about 60% of teachers have been in the building for more than two years.

The school is in the third year of a three-year Magnet Grant in Museum Studies, which gives it access to resources from various museums in the New York City area. There is a special class at each grade level for students who have been identified as "intellectually gifted." Otherwise, students are placed in mixed ability groups.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a strong, highly-experienced instructional leader who manages the school in a firm but participatory way.
- School leaders work hard, and successfully, to create a safe and secure environment and a very positive school culture that is conducive to learning.
- The school successfully identifies students at risk of academic failure and provides them with very effective additional support.
- The school has an especially sophisticated system for monitoring and recording progress in the development of literacy skills.
- Teachers use assessment data very well to differentiate work and to prepare students for future standardized tests.
- Lessons are generally well structured, well taught, and engaging for students.
- Students are especially well behaved and respectful of each other, the teachers, and school administrators.
- Teachers and students engage in a number of very valuable community service programs as a way of teaching students the importance of “giving back” to their community.
- The school provides many excellent opportunities for job-embedded professional learning, with strong support from the principal, the assistant principals, a math coach, reading specialists, and outside consultants.

What the school can improve

- Provide additional opportunities for teachers to view and constructively critique lessons taught by colleagues.
- Further develop the analysis of data on instructional quality practices by grade level and subject area.
- Develop even better means of setting more explicit, measurable, interim goals for student progress.
- Extend the progress that has already been made in support of the school's balanced literacy program to other subject areas, particularly in mathematics.
- Extend the system for reviewing student writing samples to include significant pieces of written work in mathematics and science.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

Public School / Intermediate School 104 is an especially well-run school where the principal combines knowledgeable, experienced instructional leadership with skillful change management. She has a firm but participatory leadership style which focuses on the school community as a “family.” There is a clear emphasis on both academic excellence and the personal development in children. Parents, teachers, and students all express satisfaction with the school’s kindergarten through grade 8 structure, meaning that students can stay in the same school until they transition to high school.

The principal has established a culture of high expectations for teachers and students. Following her excellent example, teachers work especially hard to meet the varying academic needs of students. Teachers at each grade level form tight-knit teams that meet together on a regular basis (often volunteering their own time) to share ideas, refine curriculum plans, and discuss student needs. The school has an especially strong balanced literacy program.

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.

In addition to data provided in the form of GROW reports in mathematics, language arts, social studies and science, the school collects and collates data from a range of other sources to track student progress on a regular basis throughout the year. This data is used very effectively to compare the performance of the school in comparison with similar schools and achievements made in previous years. The data is also used to carefully track student progress on a regular basis throughout the year. A system of teacher-developed unit tests in all four core subject areas in grades 2-8, presented in the same format as the annual State tests, is administered, for example, at 4-5-week intervals and provides teachers with timely information on skills development and emerging content knowledge of individual students. End of unit tests are supplemented effectively by Princeton Review assessments in language arts and mathematics. These present item-level results and thus make it relatively easy for teachers to identify needs and effectively differentiate instruction. These results, together with links to appropriate resources, are available online for teachers and parents.

The collection of data on student literacy development is especially sophisticated. All English language arts teachers maintain their own “literacy binders” for each class, in which they record data from diagnostic assessments together with detailed documentation on each student’s strengths and needs, the strategies they have used to address needs, and the results. The principal regularly reviews the binders as a means of holding teachers accountable for the literacy development of all students. A similar system, though not as well developed, is being used for documenting how teachers identify and address students’ needs in mathematics. Additional qualitative information on student

performance is maintained in science notebooks, writer's notebooks, and mathematics' journals. A system exists for reviewing samples of student writing, using rubrics developed for this purpose. The school is now working to include the review of significant student writing in mathematics and science.

Working with the local area superintendent, instructional leaders have begun tracking the progress of age cohorts from one year to the next. However, this process is somewhat limited by the presence of transient students, newly arrived immigrants, and children from the nearby Army base, who often attend the school for a year or less.

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.

Teachers and instructional leaders have access to an especially rich set of data on student achievement in the core subject areas. The data is used regularly to identify individual learning needs, and to plan instruction for individual students. Instructional leaders do not as yet set specific intermediate goals for group-level progress as a collaborative process with teacher teams. However, there is a well-developed goal of helping all students make significant progress, no matter what their starting points, and so goal setting occurs at the individual student level, rather than the group level.

A special effort is made to meet the needs of students who have been identified as at risk of academic failure, either through the GROW reports, diagnostic assessments such as the Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System (ECLAS) or on the basis of performance on the Princeton Review interim assessments and the end-of-unit tests prepared by grade-level teachers. At-risk students who are identified in this way receive additional support during the school day, the 50-minute extended day three days each week, and during an after-school program.

Parents are kept well informed of academic and behavioral expectations for students. Teachers hold meetings with parents at the beginning of each year at which they preview the year's curriculum, so that parents will know what to expect. Teachers also offer formal parent-teacher conferences twice a year, and as often as needed throughout the year. During these they discuss student progress and identify areas to work on. Students up to grade 5 maintain homework notebooks, which parents must sign off. In grades 6 and above students are expected to take over full responsibility for completing their homework assignments on time. Parents state confidently that the school is successful in helping them work together as partners with teachers in supporting the academic growth of their children.

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.

Teachers meet regularly together in grade-level teams to ensure that curriculum, assessment, and instruction are all aligned with academic standards. Teachers have been

involved in the development of comprehensive curriculum maps in the core subject areas, and these are updated on a regular basis during the school year to align with changing student needs.

There is an especially strong emphasis on a “balanced” approach to literacy instruction that combines an emphasis on writing across the curriculum and widespread independent reading with basic skills development. A number of programs, encompassing every grade level, have been developed to prevent reading failure. In addition to the expectation that students will read a minimum of 25 books during the year, the school makes a “Book of the Month” selection that is read and discussed by students at every grade level throughout the school. As a result many students are avid readers and willingly share their love of literature when questioned. All students are expected to maintain writer’s notebooks to improve student performance in writing and this strategy is proving very effective.

Lessons in most subjects are practical and interactive and care is taken not to make excessive use of text books. As a result lessons are generally interesting and hold the attention of the students, leading to effective learning. Instruction in mathematics is based on the Everyday Math series in grades kindergarten through 5, and the Impact Math series in grades 6-8. The latter curriculum proves especially challenging for students, especially for those who have not had a solid grounding in the Everyday Math series. The school is aware of the need to make teaching in this area as practical and interactive as it is in other subjects and is working to devise ways of achieving this. Students are organized in groups in almost every classroom, and many teachers make effective use of the groups to differentiate instruction, especially in English language arts.

The principal makes good use of limited financial and human resources and appointments are based on the needs identified in the school’s Comprehensive Education Plan. Space is a particular issue. Class sizes are large and the school is operating at well over 100% capacity with storage rooms and even a large closet having been turned into classrooms or other instructional areas. Attendance is not a problem in this school. Sustained absences draw immediate attention. Students who have a record of poor attendance are monitored especially closely.

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.

Instructional leaders regularly monitor classroom instruction through both formal and informal observations. The principal and assistant principals are in classrooms on a daily basis. Through these observations, and through careful monitoring of student performance data as well as teacher’s documentation of their instruction, leaders hold teachers accountable for instructional quality, and identify teachers who may need additional support through coaching and mentoring. The school does not currently have a literacy coach, although the principal, who has a strong background in this area, performs this function herself to a large degree, with support from an outside consultant and reading specialists. The mathematics’ coach, while supported by an external consultant, is currently focused primarily on working with teachers in the upper grades, even though there are identified needs in the lower grades as well. The principal makes a point of using available budget to purchase books and other professional resources for teachers. Teachers are often encouraged to observe a colleague when it is felt that the teacher

would benefit from seeing a model lesson and the school is working hard to create additional opportunities for teachers to critique lessons collaboratively.

The principal is a respected agent of change and other members of the instructional leadership team describe her leadership style as “participatory,” “knowledgeable,” and “self-reflective.” She is viewed as having high expectations and leads by example. She delegates well, maintains open communication, and grooms others effectively for leadership. She meets once a month with each grade-level team to discuss any issues that may be on the minds of teachers. She is widely admired and held in affection by teachers, parents, and students. As a result of the efforts of the principal and her leadership team, the school runs especially smoothly. The children are remarkably well-behaved, both during lessons and in transitions from one classroom to the next. Parents are especially appreciative of the sense of safety and security that pervades the school.

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.

Data is used effectively to identify student and teacher needs and to track progress towards goals for individual students. The Comprehensive Education Plan is viewed as a living document, and is regularly revisited and updated as necessary to bring it in line with current realities. Instructional leaders compare student progress across classrooms and intervene when necessary. Teachers meet regularly in grade-level teams to review progress and plan together. They regularly revise curriculum maps in response to changing students’ needs and lessons learned over the course of the year. They are also beginning to review student work samples systematically as an additional source of information. A literacy team meeting is held once each month, with lead teachers from each grade level attending to help maintain communication and articulation across grade levels. The principal is particularly insistent that teachers plan collaboratively, and take collective responsibility for student learning at each grade level.

The school does not as yet set specific interim goals for the improvement in student performance by grade level or subject area. Rather, there is a focus on moving individual students from one proficiency level to the next, with the idea that improvements in individual performance will naturally lead to aggregated improvements. The leadership team is now considering the possibility of building in additional sets of interim goals for aggregate student performance by grade level and subject area. This would make it easier for leaders to evaluate overall progress during the year, and to hold teachers even more accountable for specific measurable gains.

Most importantly, the principal has established a strong culture of continuous improvement. As a result, although the school has indeed made remarkable progress since the principal first took over, she and her leadership team are not content. Rather, they are committed to further refinements and extensions of current systems and processes.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Fort Hamilton School: PS / IS 104	∅	✓	+
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 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	