



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Nelson A Rockefeller School**

**Public School 121**

**5301 20 Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11204**

**Principal: Lillian Catalano**

**Dates of review: January 4 – 5, 2007**

**Reviewer: Tim Boyce**

# Content of the report

## **Part 1: The School Context**

Background information about the school

## **Part 2: Overview**

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

## **Part 3: Main Findings**

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

## **Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Public School 121 is a smaller than average elementary and middle school located in the Bensonhurst area of Brooklyn. It provides education for 267 students from pre-kindergarten through to 8. Just over 40% of the students are White, while a further 26% are Hispanic. Of the remainder 12% are Black and 18% are Asian. Thirty one students (12.7%) are English language learners while 46 (18%) are special education students.

The percentage of students with Title 1 eligibility is 84%, which is a little higher than is usually found throughout the City. Attendance, at 91.9%, is average for the City, but is slightly lower than that found in similar high need schools. The school has a lower level of stability (87%) than is usually found either in similar schools or throughout the City. In addition to the normal movements in and out of the school, some students leave at the end of 5th grade to join local magnet middle schools. Since it has spare capacity, the school attracts a number of students who transfer to the school under the No Child Left Behind legislation.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal, who is a passionate and inspirational leader, manages the school very effectively.
- Teaching is of a very high standard and results in good progress.
- Students develop good personal skills and most leave the school very well prepared for the next steps in their education.
- The caring culture that permeates the school, based on love and mutual respect, supports all students very effectively, particularly vulnerable students and those in the difficult middle school years.
- Teachers make good use of data to inform day-to-day planning and instruction.
- There are rigorous procedures to ensure good attendance and punctuality.
- There are very effective links with parents and care givers who are always encouraged to play a full and active part in the education of their children.
- Classrooms are bright and enticing and provide a stimulating environment for learning.
- The school is clean, bright, welcoming and very well equipped

### What the school needs to improve

- Further develop the analysis and presentation of data so that trends in the performance of different groups of students can be identified and tracked more easily.
- Continue to raise achievement in all subjects.
- Further develop differentiation in the planning and delivery of lessons so that students in all classes are consistently challenged by the work that is set.
- Continue to develop links with parents and caregivers so that more of them are regularly engaged in the education of their children.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

**This is a proficient school with many well-developed features.**

Since her appointment three years ago, the principal has completely turned this school around. She has created a learning environment where all members of the school 'family' feel part of a team that is starting to make a real difference to the lives of the students. As a result the school is now a happy vibrant place where teachers are enabled to give of their best and students are constantly encouraged to do their very best. This has made an enormous and positive impact on the personal and academic development of all the students and, even though academic standards still need to rise, the progress of students is good because of the consistently high quality of the instruction provided by the teachers.

Under the outstanding leadership of its inspirational principal Public School 121 has moved forward significantly over the past three years and is currently a proficient school with many well-developed aspects. It continues to make rapid strides and is well on its way to becoming well developed.

### 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 with well-developed features.**

The school makes very good use of all of the available assessment data to develop a clear picture of the ever-changing academic and personal development of each of its students and every student is very well known within the school. Test results are analyzed carefully by the principal to ensure that each individual student and class is making at least the expected progress, although more work is required in the presentation and analysis of this data so that general trends can be spotted more easily.

The progress of each individual student is also tracked very carefully by individual teachers and any significant outcomes are discussed in various gatherings, including academy meetings, after which swift and effective remedial action is taken. Particular care is taken to track the progress of English language learners and special education students. Great care is taken to provide effective support to students from all ethnic groups and the school is aware of the need to further sharpen its procedures to seek even the most subtle trends in performance by gender and ethnicity. The school is also working very hard to provide additional challenge for its highest performing students, with considerable success.

The principal and her cabinet have a very clear understanding of the school's performance in comparison with similar schools and with schools City-wide and knows that the scores gained in City and State tests are not as high as they should be despite the enormous amount of time and energy that is going in to providing a top quality education. They have tracked the gradual improvement in achievement over the past three years and, based on their records, are confident that the grade 8 test scores will be higher this year despite the fact that the school is still admitting low-performing students into its higher grade classes. Staff monitor the development of key skills for each student and because of this attention

to detail, staff and students are always aware of what is expected of them and strive to achieve the goals that they set themselves.

**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.**

The instructional staff make very good use of all the data at their disposal to set realistic and challenging academic and personal goals for the school in the detailed and well considered Comprehensive Education Plan. Detailed goals are set for all students, and this is having a very positive impact on the progress that they make. The goals set for specific students are reviewed at the daily academy meetings when staff members meet together each lunchtime to discuss the progress of students and the impact of curriculum planning. In addition, teaching staff, who maintain detailed records on the learning and the development of skills for each student, constantly adjust their planning and teaching to meet the needs of the students. Clear targets are set for each student, and all know exactly how well they are doing and respond very positively to the high expectations the staff have of them.

The school monitors its most vulnerable students very carefully and takes particular care to analyze the difficulties experienced by each of the new students that join the school in grade levels other than pre-kindergarten. This was demonstrated very effectively when a group of staff, including visiting professionals, engaged in a very rigorous examination of the difficulties still being experienced by a student that had joined the school in grade 6 and whose needs had not been fully met by the wide range of programs provided for her. The progress made by special education students and English language learners is tracked very carefully. Teachers and support staff work together well as a team to set realistic and achievable small steps to secure improvement.

The school has established a very effective relationship with some of its parents and is working very hard to involve more parents and caregivers to be more involved in the ongoing education of their children. Parents receive regular progress reports and are invited to come in to school at regular intervals to examine work and discuss wider educational issues. Parents are very appreciative of the time taken by staff to produce individual portfolios of work for each student which are then the focus of discussions at these meetings.

**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.**

The school selects its curriculum with care to meet the needs of individual students as identified by its regular analysis of the available assessment data and frequent analysis of the development of key skills. Interim assessments are taken through the year, very effectively building an accurate picture of the ongoing progress of each cohort and class in each curricular area as they move through the school. Budgeting decisions are clearly driven by the needs revealed by emerging data, and in such a small school are very

carefully balanced. For example, the principal was forced to make a very difficult choice in deciding to let her assistant principal move to another school so that she could retain the required balance of expertise and experience within the instructional staff.

Instructional staff are held to account by the principal for the progress of all of the students in their charge and all staff are determined that their students will succeed and achieve their very best. There is an open and positive learning environment within the school with staff freely exchanging the most successful ideas and techniques. This has a very significant impact on the quality of the learning throughout the school with all students gaining access to the ideas and skills of the best teachers.

Teachers plan interesting and stimulating lessons and are careful to match work accurately to the needs of each individual. Curriculum time and other resources are allocated carefully and imaginatively. The very best use is made, for example, of the subject expertise of the science teacher and the specialist equipment available in her room to ensure that students in grades 6, 7 and 8 receive the full range of scientific experiences that are appropriate to their age and performance level. The school also takes great care to schedule the use of the numerous laptop computers that are available. As a result students have a good technical knowledge of computers and frequently use them as a tool in the different lessons they experience.

The culture for learning that exists in the school is based on care and mutual respect with all students feeling valued and appreciated. As a result behavior is excellent and students make the most of the time available to them in lessons. Students report that the school is like one big happy family and that there are many adults with whom they could discuss a problem if they were concerned about any aspect of school life. The school follows up on all absences diligently and in many cases absence will result in a personal call from the principal. Students confidently stated that "You would be stupid not coming to school as it is much more interesting than being at home."

**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.**

The principal, who has appointed the great majority of the instruction and support staff since the time she joined the school three years ago, selects all staff members with particular care. She goes to extraordinary lengths to make sure that they will fit in as part of the family. As a result she has assembled a very effective team with an excellent balance of youth and experience which serves the students very well. All staff are given very good opportunities to visit other schools and to take part in other professional development opportunities and care is taken to ensure that these experiences are shared with all other staff as time allows. All staff focus on helping their students to achieve their full potential by making the very best use of all available performance data to match work to the needs of students, particularly special education students and English language learners, who do particularly well as a result.

Staff meet as often as they can in various different teams to plan and revise work programs. Their discussion of the progress of individuals and groups of students is very effectively supported by the decision to split this already small school into teaching and learning academies and re-scheduling lunch breaks. As a result, all of the staff in an academy have the opportunity to have lunch together every day. This enables the regular

exchange of information and ideas and has a very positive impact on the standard of teaching and learning in the school.

The school is very well managed by the principal who has a fantastic ability to sell her vision of the school's future when writing various bids for additional funding. As a result, the school is exceedingly well equipped. It has new furniture from top to bottom and has just opened a magnificent new library, all funded by additional grants. The school has also recently been notified that it will receive a further \$1.5 million to fund the reconstruction of a schoolyard fully equipped with basketball courts, a tennis court and a track run, in addition to a fully equipped state of the art Early Childhood play area. The principal is respected and loved by the students, many of whom would be devastated if they did not see her at least once a day for one of her hugs. Students rightly believe the school to be a very effective place and enjoy all of their subjects. The school has excellent relationships with outside agencies which are used to good effect to support the most vulnerable students and to help the school achieve the academic and personal goals it sets for students.

**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 is exceedingly reflective and is adept at analyzing its own strengths and weaknesses and in finding new ways to help its students to succeed. The Comprehensive Education Plan is reviewed and updated regularly and staff are constantly fine-tuning their instructional programs to better match the needs of all their students. Data is collected continuously by staff, who through their periodic assessments diligently plot the gains made and the skills developed, as students move through the school. Regular meetings are held to discuss the progress of vulnerable students and to consider the progress made by English language learners and special education students.

The achievement of students in different classes is monitored rigorously by the principal, even though in most grade levels all of the students are in the same class. Where differences are identified, prompt action is taken to remedy any shortcomings. As a result achievement is continuing to improve and the school is well on the way to achieving the success it is working so hard to achieve.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Nelson Rockefeller School (PS 21)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			X

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X