



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**Sheldon A. Brookner School
Public School 135**

**684 Linden Boulevard
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Penny Grinage

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Reviewer: Kath Wood

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 135, Sheldon Brookner School, was opened in 1923 and was designed to house 500 students from kindergarten through grade 8. As the school population grew beyond the building's capacity, portable classrooms were added to the schoolyard and, 12 years ago, the kindergarten and grade 1 classes were moved to an annex building a mile away. There are presently 799 students enrolled, from pre-kindergarten through grade 5, with 225 of these being educated in the annex. One of the assistant principals has responsibility for the students and staff in the annex building. The annex is shared with another school, which is also using the building to resolve overcrowding issues.

Within each grade there are Star (gifted), Javits (high achiever), general education and special education classes. A small proportion of students (2.5%) across the school have been identified as special education students and 2.6% of students are English language learners, so specialist support classes are small. Most of the students (96%) are Black with the remainder having White, Hispanic or Asian heritage. A slightly higher proportion of students (77.8%) are Title 1 eligible than in similar and City schools. Attendance is 93%, in line with similar and City schools.

The school has been identified as a High Performing/Closing the Gap School for the last three years and anticipates receiving the distinction for the 2005/2006 academic year.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The administration is strong and effective with a clear vision for school improvement.
- Very good relationships are evident throughout the school, creating a secure learning environment.
- Teachers, parents and the wider community enjoy positive involvement in the development of the school.
- Professional development is very good quality with well organized activities that are carefully structured to respond to whole school and individual needs.
- The principal and assistant principals manage the challenge of the two school sites effectively through systems and structures that ensure good communication.
- A wide range of support staff is available to support students experiencing difficulties in their learning.
- Special education students and English language learners make good progress.
- The school is high performing in all subjects when compared with similar and City schools.

What the school needs to improve

- Upgrade and improve the school building so that it becomes a stimulating and attractive learning environment.
- Encourage better continuity in students' learning across the two sites.
- Further develop the monitoring and support for teachers by the principal and assistant principals so that all instruction improves to the match the quality of the best.
- Give greater focus to differentiated instruction in all subjects to address inconsistencies between classes and grades in meeting the individual needs of all students.
- Further develop data analysis to monitor students' progress in the Star and Javits classes in each grade to compare the performance of the gifted students and high achievers with those in general education.
- Extend the practice of evaluating school goals at the end of the school year to include mid-year reviews, allowing interim changes and modifications to be made to ensure success.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school overall with some well developed features.

The well-established and effective principal works hard to maintain the high standards achieved by her students in all areas of the curriculum. Students are proud to wear the attractive uniform which identifies them as members of the PS 135 school family. Relationships within the school and with parents are very good, resulting in an open and supportive school culture. Some students display challenging behavior at times but all incidents are dealt with quickly and calmly leading to minimal disruption to learning time.

The greatest barrier to school achievement is the physical building. The main building is in need of modernization and improvement. Currently, there is only one adult bathroom for all staff to share; there is no elevator to allow access to the five floors, no gymnasium and the cafeteria requires significant upgrades. The annex, although an attractive and modern learning environment, creates organizational difficulties for faculty in terms of bus timings, staffing and retaining a cohesive picture of school goals and student progress records. The principal has established systems and structures to reduce these difficulties but recognizes that the school will only become fully unified when all the students are taught under one roof.

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 collects a wide range of information relating to individual students' progress. All students are assessed as soon they start school and are assigned to the most appropriate class based on their specific needs. At the end of each year, overall student progress is reviewed prior to class reorganization to make sure that all students are correctly placed and are receiving the right style of instruction and support. Weekly test scores and conference notes are collected by teachers to identify individual strengths and weaknesses so that intervention strategies can be organized to address specific needs. The principal and administration monitor progress in City and State tests to add to the overall achievement record for each student, sharing the information with classroom teachers and the academic intervention services team. This information includes data about other similar schools and presents the picture of achievement when compared with all City schools.

The low number of special education students and English language learners means that their small steps to improvement can be monitored closely. Due to high levels of support, these students make good progress. Analysis of data to compare achievement between classes is not yet fully developed. At present, the monitoring of both interim and summative data does not fully enable the administrative team to check that the students in the gifted, high achieving and general classes are all progressing well and to take steps to address any variations.

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 with some well developed features.

The administration and faculty are skilled in monitoring individual progress. Students are quickly identified as requiring additional support through analysis of internal and external testing data. Measures are then put in place to address their needs. Although overall scores are closely monitored, the school does not analyze test question responses to identify specific topics and themes requiring further attention. This leads to reactive responses to address needs rather than proactive curriculum alignment. The school has introduced a planning system for teachers in which group work and differentiated activities are designed based on analysis of test results. This is presently not used consistently in all grades and classes.

All students receiving academic intervention services support have individual portfolios to track their progress. The portfolios include individual targets and details of intervention strategies and programs used in addition to notes from conferences with students and their parents. Some students are making gains that are significant for them as individuals but do not constitute full level improvements. The principal is anxious to implement a program that measures short and medium term gains in order to evaluate the success of interventions. This good practice is not yet being developed consistently across the school so that students in other classes can follow carefully structured education plans.

There are high expectations for achievement within the school. The school celebrates its success in testing periods with students and their parents and encourages everyone to work hard to maintain its high achieving status. The principal ensures that each teacher knows exactly what is expected from her or him. Currently, there is no comparison of results between similar classes to increase accountability and make sure that the goals set for each class are high enough.

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.

Curriculum committees are in place for literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, art and computer studies and all teachers select one group to attend for the academic year. The committees review and update the curriculum, making sure that topics and themes are effectively organized and well resourced. This means that committee members are able to report back to colleagues in the same grade about new resources, themes and aspects of interest about their curriculum subject, keeping all staff informed and up to date.

Teachers are provided with the opportunity to do unit planning in grade teams twice each month for one hour. The principal provides monthly themes for reading, writing and mini lessons for these grade meetings based on her review of teachers’ planning sheets. These planning periods are not sufficiently frequent and formalized to increase the impact on classroom practice significantly. These sessions are not being used to scrutinize student’s work across multiple classes in the same grade which would enable teachers to compare achievement between classes and align their instruction accordingly.

Budget, staffing and scheduling decisions all have to take the management of the main school and annex into account. Additional resources, both human and physical, have to be provided to ensure the smooth running of both buildings and scheduling is made more complex by the need for movement from one building to another. This has an important impact upon overall staffing as many resources have to be duplicated on each site.

The lack of space restricts the range of enrichment activities available to enhance the curriculum. The principal works hard to extend the choices for students and has recently included music in the form of band practice, using funding from an instrument grant. Enrichment clusters are currently under discussion and several teachers have expressed an interest in joining the program to utilize their skills and talents.

The school places a high focus on improving students' attendance. Strategies are in place to monitor and support students whose attendance is below the target figure of 93%.

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 employs clear criteria when selecting staff. She looks for passion and commitment to education and often requires teachers to undertake demonstration lessons. Once employed, teachers are carefully matched to classes and grade teams so that their specific skills and abilities can be fully utilized. Regular observations, both formal and informal, are undertaken by the administrators with feedback provided either verbally or in writing. Success is acknowledged with teachers and any areas for development are addressed through the professional development system. New teachers and those identified as requiring further support are closely monitored by the principal and assistant principals. They have more frequent walk-throughs and observations in order to provide regular feedback and advice and to ensure that suggestions made for improvement are successfully implemented.

Professional development is a high priority in the school. At the start of each school year, teachers complete an assessment questionnaire to identify training needs for individuals, grades and the whole staff. A program is then planned for each semester. After attending external sessions, teachers complete workshop/training reports to describe what they learned, the implications for the school and what the next steps should be. This means that the quality of external training is monitored and information is shared with colleagues.

The coaches and staff developers provide a valuable service working on whole school and individual instructional support. The teachers work closely in teams, sharing good practice and undertaking regular visits of each other's classrooms. Buddy teachers, grade leaders and model teachers provide support to colleagues in all aspects of instruction and have had a positive impact on its quality. To overcome the challenge of organizing effective professional development for the two sites, teachers chose to have one extended lunch period each week. This has enabled the coaches to respond to the training needs identified for each semester.

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.

School structures have been established for teachers to regularly assess and evaluate students' performance in order to align instruction. This process is not consistent in all classes and the administration team uses walk-throughs and observations to monitor different teaching and learning styles used in classrooms. Intervention plans for students experiencing difficulties in their learning are monitored and revised within the portfolio system.

All teachers are involved in constructing the school's Comprehensive Education Plan. Groups of teachers work on different sections of the plan, using their knowledge of students' performance in all areas of the curriculum. The principal and the school cabinet undertake an end-of-year summary evaluation of progress towards school goals. This exercise is informed by test results and teachers' responses to a series of written questions. This system encourages teachers to have ownership of the plan and increases commitment to achieving the school targets. The plan is a large, complex document and, at present, there are no systems in place to conduct an interim review of goals. This means that plans are not revised on a sufficiently regular basis in order to respond in a timely fashion to required changes.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Sheldon A. Brookner School (PS 135)	∅	✓	+
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	