



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Nicholas Herkimer School

Public School 155

**1355 Herkimer Street
Brooklyn
NY 11233**

Principal: Nelly Rivera

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Reviewer: George McLeman

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Nicholas Herkimer, Public School 155, is a combined elementary and middle school. It teaches students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school has recently extended its grade range to include grade 7 and 8. The numbers of students vary between grades with significantly fewer in the upper grades. This year saw the first class of grade 8 students at the school. It currently has 667 students enrolled of whom 8% are special education students and 17% are English language learners. Ninety-three percent of students are Title 1 eligible. This is close to the average for similar schools but higher than City schools. The school is located in the Ocean-Hill Brownsville section of Brooklyn. The ethnicity of the school population broadly comprises 70% Black and 30% Hispanic. The attendance, at 91%, is about average for similar schools but lower than City schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The detailed assessment data gathered in the kindergarten through grade 3 classes provides teachers with a good understanding of the achievements of the students.
- The effective use of assessment data has helped improve grade 3 students' achievements.
- Effective use is made of data in planning work and teaching students who are in greatest need of improvement.
- The detailed specification of the reading curriculum in the early grades provides the teachers with a repertoire of strategies to support individual learners.
- The vision, drive and enthusiasm of the principal have been effective in improving achievement.
- Assessment data is used effectively to select and provide appropriate professional development for the instructional staff.
- The students and the community gain from the wide range of after school activities provided by the school.
- Parents declare strong support for the values and work of the school.
- The attractive and helpful display of students' work and visual aids in classrooms encourages and supports learning.
- The work of the coaches has supported the teachers in their use of data to improve instruction.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that the curriculum for the older students allows detailed assessment of the students' progress and individual needs.
- Provide more opportunities for the students to participate more actively in class and develop their oral language skills.
- Enhance the training and support for teachers to meet individual needs of the students.
- Intensify efforts to increase attendance.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The school is firmly intent on providing a strong basic education that can drive up the students' standards of academic achievement. In this respect it is steadily developing. The principal and her staff are fully committed to improving the curriculum and instruction in reading, writing and mathematics. The intensive drive on improving the learning of reading in kindergarten through grade 3 has been successful. Through closely monitoring the data on the young students' progress and by continually adapting the instruction and the program, there have been significant gains in the students' achievements in reading by the end of grade 3. Providing of a similarly well-specified and adaptable curriculum in the upper grades is more challenging, but the school is working on this and making headway. Through a wide-ranging professional development program, the instructional staff is meeting the school goals of aligning the instruction to the needs of individual students. The coaches make a significant contribution in this respect. Full, open discussion and collaboration among the staff at all levels is a strong feature of the school. While the principal demonstrates a firm and accurate understanding of the academic performances of the students, the same degree of detail and rigor is not in evidence in the analysis of the quality of the instruction across the school.

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 administrative staff has a good understanding of achievements across the grades. The teachers gather and use data to monitor the progress of their students and to identify individual need. In the younger grades, kindergarten through 3, the teachers rigorously analyze the results of literacy assessments using Early Childhood Literacy Assessments and the Dynamic Inventory of Basic Early Learning Skills scores. They place the young students on levels categorized as, "intensive", "strategic" or "benchmark" and make clear plans for the students' next steps. All assessment scores are recorded electronically and made available to staff and parents. However, there is variation in the quality of the information generated across the school. In the older grades, assessment is based heavily on the mandated testing using, for example, the scores on the Princeton Review and interim assessments. The gathering of data in grades 4 through 8 does not yet have the range or detail of that in the early grades, and consequently lacks similar application towards improving student achievement.

Close monitoring is undertaken of the achievements of students from subgroups across the school. The progress of the Black and Hispanic students is carefully compared and analyzed. The progress of the English language learners is monitored regularly and systematically and the data reveals that they make good progress in their early acquisition of English. Special education students make good progress too and this is carefully checked and recorded in their individual education plans. The school generates data about other categories of interest, such as those students who are the lowest performers in the school.

Performances of students across the classes and grades over time are monitored, discussed and inferences are drawn. The administrative staff then draws up goals for continued improvement. The tracking of the cohorts over time is undertaken but with less rigor. Comparisons with the results of test data in the region's schools are also made.

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 principal, assistant principals and coaches regularly meet to review the school's assessment data. They share a commitment to drive up standards in basic knowledge and skills. Goals are set and plans are made at whole school level from an analysis of the students' scores and achievements. Specific measurable targets are set for yearly improvement. These are then translated into specific objectives for grades and classes.

At class and grade level, the instructional staff meets weekly. They keep a close eye on the class and grade scores and continuously discuss issues and plan for improvement. After a closer look at the students' early reading progress three years ago, the school set challenging goals for improving reading scores. This involved the acquisition of a new reading program, Reading First, and the development of an associated rigorous program of instruction and assessment. As a result, the reading scores significantly improved.

The use of data to plan for the improvement of individual students in greatest need is a strength of the school's work. The group of students in greatest need of improvement changes through continual analysis of data. The progress of English language learners is closely scrutinized, for example, and classroom teachers and specialists discuss progress and set goals and devise strategies. The data reveals steady progress. Similarly, the work of the academic intervention services team identifies learning needs and provides appropriate instruction and resources. Classroom teachers, together with guidance and the academic intervention services, use the data to design and provide effective support.

The goals and objectives of the school, and how they are met, are frequently shared with parents and care givers. Parents share the school's values and appreciate its drive towards improving student performance, conveying high expectations and its emphasis on improving the basic skills of literacy and mathematics.

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.

The school has undertaken much work in aligning the English language arts curriculum to the individual needs of students in the lower grades. The detailed specification of the reading and writing program, for example, provides a repertoire of instructional approaches and resources that the teacher can apply to individual children or groups. In the process, the teaching of reading has developed well. The curriculum in the upper grades, because of the mandatory requirements, is understandably less flexible and less available for adaptation to individual needs.

Teachers are held accountable for the progress and achievements of their students. This is done chiefly through discussions at grade level meetings with coaches. Assessment data is collated and analyzed and strengths and weaknesses in instruction identified. As a result, the coaches offer strategies and provide examples of good practice. Class observations also make a contribution to the accountability of the instructional staff.

The school's goal to develop instruction to meet the needs of individual students within classrooms is gradually being met through support and conferencing but it is inconsistently practiced. Some teachers, usually in the lower grades, plan and manage their instruction to promote and allow individual development of the student. This is seen in the range of tasks given in groups while teachers focus directly on a particular topic with another group. However, the predominant mode of instruction is of whole class presentation followed by question and answer. Despite this, the students are very attentive and are well motivated in their learning. Opportunities for the students to engage more directly in their learning, are not frequent, particularly in the older grades.

The school aligns its personnel and financial resources to meeting its goal of improving standards through close attention to basic skills. Finance is targeted on class size, specialist support, pull-in and pull-out teaching, small group work and the purchase of materials in an attempt to improve learning and progress. Extra curricular activities, such as the school's Project Arts and Fit for Life after school programs provide an important width and balance to the curriculum and are much enjoyed by the students. The wide range of clubs including basketball, baseball, dance, arts and crafts, is also much appreciated.

Despite the school's constant attention and efforts, attendance is relatively low and inconsistent. This is evident particularly in the upper grades and it contributes to the relatively slower progress of these students. Students are frequently late arriving at school. The school finds that some families do not appear to value the importance of good attendance.

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.

The principal has been the school leader for five years and is steadily building the capacity of her staff to drive up the students' standards through close use of assessment data. She selects her staff on their potential and commitment to improve student performance.

The teachers follow a wide and appropriately chosen program of professional development. In some cases, such as the school's adoption of the Reading First program, much effort is placed upon ensuring that all teachers have the skills to apply the program. The coaches make a strong contribution towards this goal. They review the students' performance data with the teachers and together adopt a strategy to support the teacher's instruction. The regional staff also makes a contribution to the school's professional development. Using data on the students' performance across the grades, appropriate training and workshops are provided for the staff.

The principal or assistant principal regularly observes all teachers and this is followed by individual conferencing to set objectives for improvement. In addition, informal

observations take place frequently. From the observational data, together with information on students' performance, the principal builds up a picture of the quality of instruction across the school. Although, this picture is not detailed or rigorously constructed enough to enable precisely targeted strategies to be adopted. Planning and revision of plans occurs in teams, with staff informing each other of their goals and results.

In a short time, the principal has earned the respect of the school community and has demonstrated a strong capacity to manage improvement. The school runs smoothly, with all procedures being clear and understood by all. Partnerships with organizations, such as Penny Harvest and Neighborhood Music and Arts, enrich students' academic experiences in 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.

The goals set in the principal's performance review and the Comprehensive Education Plan are clear, precise and relevant. The principal regularly reviews them with the local superintendent and as a result, goals and strategies are adjusted where necessary. With a few exceptions, the school's long-term goals are met with a yearly increase in the students' performances in English language arts and mathematics.

At grade and classroom levels, the administrative team meets with coaches and teachers to assess the effectiveness of plans and interventions through comparisons of student progress. These meetings encompass discussions on the quality of the instruction, the use of additional personnel, the adoption of learning programs and the grouping of the students. The discussions and decisions are shared with the school's cabinet and school leadership teams.

The goals and objectives set for individual progress are also regularly reviewed and revised by teachers and specialists. This is seen in the work of the academic intervention services team who continually seek updated information on the progress and achievements of individual students to check on the relevance and impact of their programs. The school recognizes that the next steps for improvement entail gathering detailed evidence of the students' progress in the upper grades and using that to provide more relevant, consistent and challenging instruction to accelerate learning.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Nicholas Herkimer School (PS 155)	∅	✓	+
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 knows and respect students and responds 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	