



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Benjamin Franklin School

Public School 157

**850 Kent Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11205**

Principal: Maribel Torres

Dates of review: May 22 - 23, 2007

Reviewer: Mike Sutton

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

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

The Benjamin Franklin School is an elementary school in the east of Brooklyn and has 336 students enrolled from pre kindergarten through grade five. Around 83% of the students are Hispanic, and 17% are Black. The main language spoken, other than English is Spanish with about 30% of the students who are English language learners. This is higher than the average for similar schools and City schools generally. Of those enrolled, 12% are special education students and the school has three self contained special education classes.

All of the students received Title 1 funding. This is much higher than the average for similar and City wide schools. Attendance at about 94% is better than the average for similar and City schools.

The school is in the same building as one other elementary school with which it shares cafeteria and auditorium. The principal was appointed to the school in September 2007.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is exceptionally well led by the principal and strongly supported by her assistant principal and all staff.
- The school has a very strong collegiate climate, where cooperation and collaboration among staff, students and parents are very positive.
- The school has excellent relations with parents, who play an increasingly valuable role in the life of the school.
- The school gathers a wide range of data to understand where it is making progress and where it could do still better.
- There are very strong systems to provide interventions and help to those students who need it most.
- The students like school, behave well and their attendance is good. They feel safe and well cared for.
- The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and pre and post school support groups for students.
- The school has a very good understanding of what it does well and where it could do still better.
- The school runs well on a day-to-day basis and office, support and paraprofessional staff provide very good assistance to the teachers and students.

What the school needs to improve

- Make more strategic use of data to set short, medium and longer term goals for continued improvement.
- Ensure the school development plans contain quantified success criteria, to enable the teams of teachers, coaches and administration to regularly check progress.
- Raise the achievement of female students, particularly in the older age classes.
- Ensure more challenge for higher achieving students in classrooms, particularly through hands-on and stimulating work.
- Continue to develop staff understanding and confidence with data and ensure that criteria for hiring new staff take account of this skill.
- Ensure that the students, staff and parents have wider opportunities to contribute their views on the progress and development of the school.

3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with well-developed features.

Under the leadership of the new principal the school has accelerated its improvement of recent years. The proportion of students reaching proficiency level or better is rising steadily with a corresponding drop in the proportion needing high levels of intervention. The school collects a wide range of data, which is organized efficiently to enable comprehensive analysis. This analysis looks closely at individuals and classes but does not examine sufficiently the comparative performance of males and females.

Teaching provides sufficient engagement and stimulus to the students. There are particularly good systems to support the special education and English language learner students but the school could be doing more for those students who already meet the expected age related standards.

The students are well cared-for and the school has developed very strong links with parents. The teachers work effectively in teams but their planning lacks sufficient information from the analysis of the data, which the school collects. There is a strong climate of collaboration and everyone works well together. The work of individual teams is well recorded but there is insufficient steer provided by the school development plan.

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 gathers a wide range of assessment data. This includes information from standard City tests, end of curriculum unit tests and a range of specific tests for different age and achievement ranges. These cover achievements of English speakers and English language learners in all aspects of mathematics and English language arts. The school has devised its own tests to enable special education teachers to specifically gauge their students' progress towards the targets set in their individual education plans. The school also makes very good use of the regular assessments from the computer based materials used to teach reading and teachers keep a wide range of on-going records covering mathematics, English and students' personal development.

The school gathers and evaluates data to give a clear picture of achievement by subject, grade, class and individual student. Analysis by ethnic sub-group is not feasible because at grade level there is usually only one statistically significant group. The school has a good overview of this aspect when aggregated across all grades. However, it does not sufficiently analyze the data by gender group. There is clear evidence within the data that as the students move from the younger to older age grades, the performance of the males overtakes that of the females in most subject areas.

The school has a very accurate picture of its performance over time from rigorous monitoring of data. The results from this year's tests have been evaluated immediately and confirm still further improvements. The school's results overall compare very positively against similar schools and in mathematics in particular are closing in on the average for City schools. The results continue to show that relatively low proportions of students reach the highest levels of achievement.

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 well-developed features.

The school uses its analysis of the data well in planning for individuals and groups of students. It is less assured at using data to set longer term strategic plans for improvement. The different teams of teachers make good use of the data to gauge progress for individuals and to adjust interventions. They are less aware of the wider picture, such as the need to concentrate more on higher achievers or on female students.

The school addresses the needs of special education students very effectively. The range and regular use of assessments gives teachers and support staff a very accurate and up to date evaluation of where each student is making best progress and where more is needed. The school has also made astute moves to support the English language learners who, under new regulations were due to sit state tests for the first time. Specific classes and preparation on Saturdays has helped take the uncertainty out of the process for these students and enabled them to show how well they can do. The intervention team and where necessary, the counselor and parent coordinator work well as a team with teachers to ensure that no struggling student slips by unnoticed.

The school works extremely well with parents and sets high expectations for their children. The parents have been steadily drawn into the school's work by persistent initiatives from the parent coordinator, the principal and staff. The parents attend a wide range of informative workshops, classes and social events in ever-increasing numbers. They feel very comfortable approaching members of staff if they have a concern about their children. The teachers too, are proactive in contacting parents to discuss concerns and to give good news about children's progress. Combined with the regular teacher-parent conferences and many informal notes and phone calls, the parents receive good quality information about their children's progress. The school has not grasped enough opportunities to consult parents more formally on how to make further improvements to the school.

All members of the school see their prime purpose as raising students' achievements. The agendas and minutes of the different teams and committees show regular discussions of assessments and a continued focus on improvement. This is also reflected in the staff professional development agendas and in the content of many of the workshops for parents. The staff have looked for every opportunity to provide students with stimulation and enrichment. For example, the author/illustrator project was initiated by a teacher and quickly embraced by the whole staff.

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 uses the mandated curriculum. This is enhanced with specific commercial computer-based learning programs, which provide regular assessment data for individuals and groups of students. The mathematics curriculum has regular assessments embedded within its structure. The reading books used by the students are carefully graded for difficulty. The grading correlates closely with the assessment information from the computer based learning. This enables the teachers to check the students’ progress through the various coded grades of books and provides further valuable information by which the school can judge its overall improvement. The impetus for improvement is maintained by the coaches, who use the data to determine where particular teachers need more support or where individual students could do with more help.

The teachers see themselves as fully accountable for their students’ progress. They collaborate strongly in grade teams to evaluate progress and plan new lessons. The main thrust of the school’s work this year has been to improve students’ writing and there is ample of evidence of a concerted approach to this. The corridor and classrooms walls are filled with students’ writing and the art teacher has ensured that her work links closely with what the teachers do in the classrooms. There is a high degree of coherence and consistency across the school.

The teachers sufficiently differentiate their lessons to ensure that the majority of students have the right degree of challenge. The teaching engages the students but does not place sufficient demands on the higher-achieving students. At times, they repeat work already mastered or undertake relatively mundane tasks. There are too few opportunities for hands-on work or work that makes them think about or approach tasks in different ways.

The budget has been used very well to ensure maximum targeted support for students, through after school and Saturday study groups. Staff are appointed with careful thought to particular strengths such as the librarian and art teachers’ abilities to support writing development. Scheduling is very carefully planned to allow staff good opportunities for joint preparation. Astute use of the budget and of scheduling was made to complete grade by grade reviews of assessment systems. This resulted in a more coherent and consistent process across the school.

Attendance rates are good. The students enjoy school and there are very secure systems to check on absentees. The social worker and counselor work closely with parents where there are problems.

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 school hires staff on their abilities to work collaboratively and to teach in ways that enable each student to make maximum progress. The school has not yet considered how

to ensure new teachers have sufficient expertise to use assessment data to evaluate students' progress and to plan new work.

Professional development is well organized. It links closely with the overall focus for development with flexibility for individual staff development identified through one-on-one profession discussions with the principal. The staff commitment to professional development is seen in the numbers who take part in the voluntary lunchtime weekly 'lunch and learn' discussions.

The principal and assistant make regular visits to classrooms to support teachers and to check on students' progress. The staff seek every opportunity to learn from these visits and from each other through co-teaching, collaborative planning and wherever possible from observing one another teach.

The grade teams, cabinet and intervention teams meet regularly. They plan for developments and improvements but do not have sufficiently sharp or clear data to use in identifying what general improvements are most needed. For example, the various teams have consistently focused on developing students' reading and writing. They have not picked up the issue of girls under-achievement relative to male students because the data has not been analyzed sufficiently clearly to show this needs attention.

The principal has made a significant impact since her appointment in September 2006. She is widely respected, has already made good improvements and has the clear capacity to continue these. The school runs smoothly with office staff quietly and effectively fielding a wide range of day-to-day matters. The school makes good use of its very strong associations with a wide range of external organizations. These provide good support for students' learning, particularly with targeted groups of students before and after 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 school's development plan covers most key areas. The focus for each subject relates to the development needs identified through the data. The actions needed for improvement are clear but the outcomes to show improvement are not. These frequently state further actions and there are very few improvements that are quantified as increases in students' achievements.

The school has this year invested in a single format data base to record all students' achievements. This is already proving good value as the achievements of each student, class and grade are visible at a glance. This enables more rigorous and precise analysis of progress of individuals and groups of students. The system is new and further training is planned to help teachers make maximum use of the powerful information it contains.

Development planning for subjects as well as the whole school remains static across the year. The initial plans focus on the right areas but until recently, the school has not had the quality of data needed to make the in-year adjustments that may from time to time be needed. Already the new data recording and analysis system is showing its potential and the school is looking to make greater use of the information it reveals for next year.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Benjamin Franklin School (PS 157)	∅	✓	+
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	