



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

George Gershwin Intermediate School

Intermediate School 166

**800 Van Siclen Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11207**

Principal: Maria Ortega

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Reviewer: Alan Geller

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The George Gershwin School, Intermediate School 166, located in the East New York section of Brooklyn is an intermediate school which serves 667 students in grades six through eight. The school population is comprised of 82% Black, 16% Hispanic, 1% White and 1% Asian students. The school receives Title 1 funding with 72% eligibility. There are 88 students (13%) receiving special education service in self-contained and collaborative team teaching classes. There are 28 (4%) English language learners who receive a push-in mode of instruction. The attendance rate, at 88%, is slightly below similar and City schools.

The school was recently restructured forming 3 small learning communities. The school shares the building with a charter school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is well respected by the staff, students and parents and is creating a positive learning environment.
- The principal has effectively shared her vision for the school, resulting in a staff committed to helping each student to achieve.
- The school has been restructured into three small learning communities that provide students with the opportunity to work more closely with their teachers in a theme-based program.
- Data is tracked to analyze performance and progress of students is developing.
- Technology is utilized to develop intervention activities for students in need as well as enrichment.
- School programs provide emotional and academic support for students as a means of encouraging learning, which is having a positive impact.
- Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are based upon the data and aligned to meet the needs of students.
- Students feel respected by their teachers and the school leaders resulting in a greater willingness to accept school procedures and a generally calm and orderly atmosphere.
- The parents are very pleased with the positive changes since the new principal arrived and appreciate the improved school programs.

What the school needs to improve

- Further develop the teachers' skills in collecting and tracking performance data as a means to inform the instructional program by planning next learning steps.
- Further develop the feedback received by students regarding their writing pieces so they will better understand what they need to do to improve.
- Further develop the use of assessment tools as a means of tracking students on a more regular basis, including groups of students.
- Further systematize the monitoring, assessment and evaluation of results of school plans and interventions to ensure their effectiveness.
- Continue to provide opportunities for teachers to observe each other and to participate in self- and peer-evaluation activities.
- For all teachers, continue to develop and share techniques to differentiate instruction in all classes as a means to further engage students.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is proficient school.

Since the principal arrived at the school approximately 3 years ago, many positive changes have taken place. The organization and tone of the school have improved, and the school is generally calm and orderly. Students respect the way the principal supports them and they make a strong effort to do well everyday. The staff is, for the most part, supportive of the principal's vision and has high expectations for the students. The school leaders support the staff, which has resulted in more teachers remaining in the school from year to year. This has also decreased teacher absenteeism, which has enhanced student learning and classroom management.

The restructuring of the school, one year ago, into three small learning communities, has led to a more positive learning culture and some better student performance. Staff members feel well supported by the school leaders especially in the constructive suggestions provided to guide their instructional programs. The school has introduced new programs to help students during their adolescent growth years that have had a positive impact in their attitude toward learning.

Data collection and analysis has been introduced to the staff by the school leaders. There is some good practice on assessment and its use to guide instruction and plan the next steps in learning for students which is beginning to lead to more consistent practice across the school. New plans and programs have been introduced but as of yet have not impacted significantly on test scores. Due to the commitment of teachers and the leadership of the principal, the school is ready to make the necessary improvements.

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 principal and her team support the staff in collecting and tracking performance data as a means to understand how student's, classes and grades are achieving, but this needs to be further developed. Teachers collect different kinds of data that generally allows the teachers to note student progress. This data includes standardized test scores, diagnostic examinations and interim assessments which need to be further analyzed so teachers can better track individual students, classes and grades. Teachers collect data in assessment notebooks as a means of reviewing group progress. Baseline data for the Impact Mathematics program was introduced to inform teachers of the benchmarks to be reached for each child. The school leaders and the teachers have divided classes into their performance levels as a way to determine who needs extra support which has been useful.

Special education students are mainly taught in self contained classes and each child has an individual educational plan to ensure they are receiving the proper instruction. State scores are used as a means to track progress. English language learners are taught in the general education classes and receive additional push-in support. The principal has noted

that the eighth grade students scored lower on mathematics tests and this is an area to further analyze by disaggregating the data, by ethnic groups.

The school looks at students in greatest need and provides intervention plans for them. The school compares itself to similar schools in their own cohort to note their strengths and to identify useful strategies or programs that have proven successful in improving student performance. The past performance of students is a primary focus to determine how students improved from year to year and is one way the school judges the effectiveness of programs. Coaches, assistant principals and teachers look at student work and participate in learning walks to assess the areas of strength and weakness to determine the next learning steps. Tools such as the Developmental Reading Assessments are used to measure student progress.

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.

School leaders work with subject area departments to create plans to decrease the number of students in level 1 which is an ongoing goal. Using the standards and the regional calendar of skills, plans are being developed to meet the needs of students to reach targeted goals, although this is not easily accomplished since individual tracking of student progress is not consistent across the school. Subject area planning meetings, as well as faculty meetings are collaborative and have helped to develop open lines of communication between the school leaders and the faculty. The staff is committed to improving students’ learning and using small group instruction allows students to receive more focused support. Available data is used to create plans for students in greatest need to receive intervention programs to reach the benchmark goal for their grade. The school has developed unit plans and programs that are focused to meet the needs of all students which are in different stages of development so the effect is not always clear.

Based upon evidence of many good samples of student work on display as well as work in student work folders, students are working hard to achieve the high expectations set for them. There is a specific format for displaying work which includes a rubric and student feedback, which is not precise enough so students know what to do to improve. In most cases, students feel that the staff has high expectations for them which are seen in the challenging work they have to do as well as through the ongoing support received. The school has developed positive relationships with the parents by sharing expectations and keeping open lines of communication where they can share information. The parents view the school more positively due to the more positive tone and the improved educational programs in place in classrooms. The school leaders are aware of the goals they want to achieve and the teachers, for the most part, share these goals yet they have not consistently been implemented. Teachers are ready to accept a more fully developed plan of action to review the data and track progress.

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 mandated curriculum is used as well as interim assessments that are selected by the region which generate data about the results of exams, writing selections and reading improvement, yet this is not consistently used to track individual and class progress. Additional programs are used to provide supplementary support for students in greatest need which is slowly starting to positively affect state scores. Common planning meetings have proven to be useful in providing focused time for school leaders, coaches, and faculty to review data to determine next learning steps. Additionally school leaders, coaches and teachers are involved in walkthroughs in which they observe lessons to determine how they can be improved to meet the school goals. These results are also used to judge the effectiveness of staff as it relates to student test results which is one way to hold staff accountable.

There is some developing practice in differentiating instruction as a part of the small group instruction, yet this needs to be fully embedded into the practice of teachers. Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are aligned and based upon meeting the needs of students. For example, two additional academic intervention teachers have been hired to supplement service for those in greatest need. The principal has sustained staff strengths by selecting two exceptional teachers to serve the school as coaches in that they know their students and the subject area. Students are, for the most part, engaged by instructional activities which have been further improved by the workshop model in which the teachers work more closely with small groups of students as well as individuals. Students have been scheduled to receive 12 periods of English language arts, an increase of 4 periods, which provides more time to improve reading and writing skills.

The restructuring to academies has supported engagement as students have become more familiar with their teachers and enjoy the planned program. Overall, students are on task and are behaving and working in class and this is allowing them to learn more. The staff treats students with respect and this is reciprocated in most cases. Students feel comfortable in requesting support from a staff member and feel that the school is much safer than in prior years. Student attendance is actively pursued by the teachers and the support staff. Parents are alerted of absences by calls or visits to the home. Attendance has improved this year as a result of these efforts. Lateness remains an issue although everyone is concerned about improving this.

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, assistant principal and teachers are involved in selecting staff based upon their desire to work collaboratively and to establish strong connections with the middle school student. The entire staff, for the most part, has embraced the desire to work collaboratively and to connect to the middle school child that has improved student attitudes towards school and improved school tone. Students are now more interested in learning than before the new principal arrived. There is a great deal of good teaching at the school which promotes student learning which has been supported by the academy structure and professional development. Professional development is based upon the needs identified by teachers which are directly related to using the data, as of yet are not consistently developed.

A major forum to improve teaching skills is the weekly planning meeting where teachers are able to share strategies that work in sessions conducted by the coaches or assistant

principals. As a result of these meetings, achievement trends are steady, for the most part, but not in all areas. Teachers serve as resources to further support each other. The principal regularly observes teaching and provides constructive feedback that is well received by the staff and accepted. The principal has specific plans to help teachers who are not performing well. Teachers are afforded opportunities to observe each other; however additional peer observations followed by debriefing sessions focusing on peer and self evaluations need to be further developed. Subject area teams meet regularly to plan and evaluate results, yet at this time the systems are too new to have had significant impact. The principal is well respected by the entire school community. She is the driving force behind the positive changes in student attitudes and school tone. She is very ambitious about establishing goals and raising achievement levels. Overall, the school is calm and orderly, and the students feel that this is a safe place to learn. Partners with community agencies have a positive impact on students' personal and academic needs. The principal has recruited different organizations to deal specifically with the needs of adolescence.

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 undeveloped.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is used on an ongoing basis to measure the effectiveness of school plans as well as long range plans, so that the school can monitor how they are progressing towards achieving their goals. The principal, the cabinet and the team leaders convene to discuss the barriers to reaching the school goals. For example, in order for a four week plan writing unit to be successful it was determined that more time would be needed in order for the students to develop mastery. The team developed the subsequent unit plans and students had the time needed to develop their skills further.

The use of data to monitor student progress is not well aligned, making it difficult to accurately measure student progress within and across classrooms. The school looks at interim assessments and the built in assessments of the curriculum to measure progress, and is aware of the need to do this on a more regular basis. The school has structures that monitor and revise plans when they are not going as expected. For example, the America's Choice curriculum in English language arts had to be adjusted to make the connection to the needs of the students. This was revised and implemented on a timely basis. The staff is beginning to work collaboratively to plan and revise curricular plans. The school leaders are aware that monitoring of plans and goals must be more consistent, with specific timeframes to convene teams to review student progress so that instruction is focused and effective.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: George Gershwin Intermediate School (IS 166)	∅	✓	+
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		