



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Barbara Reing School

Public School 255

**1866 East 17th Street
Brooklyn
NY 11229**

Principal: Linda L. Singer

Dates of review: October 13 - 16, 2006

Reviewer: Mary Summers

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

This popular school serves children not just from the locality but also from other parts of the district. There are 712 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. Almost one student in seven is a special education student. About half the students come from White backgrounds and there are about twice as many from Asian and Eastern European backgrounds than found in similar schools. Almost one third of students are English language learners and a large number of these are recent immigrants, mainly from Pakistan, Ukraine and Russia. Title 1 eligibility is about the same as in similar schools. Teachers are well qualified and experienced although there are seven new teachers this year. Attendance is above average for both similar and City-wide schools at over 94%.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has been effective in helping all groups, including English language and special education students, make academic progress.
- Students are well-behaved, polite and respectful towards adults and each other, and take an active role in their own learning.
- A sense of family and community pervades all aspects of the school's work, which results in a warm and welcoming learning environment.
- The school welcomes families from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds and parents are valued as partners in the learning process.
- High quality instruction engages students' interest and makes learning fun.
- The school provides very well for special education students.
- Students' progress is tracked carefully to identify underachievement and to trigger immediate intervention through a range of effective strategies.
- An imaginative and rich curriculum makes learning relevant and meets the needs of the whole child.
- The principal, who has high visibility and a hands-on approach, has high expectations of her staff and openly values their work.
- Teachers are held accountable for the performance of their students, and lessons are regularly monitored by the administration to ensure that students receive high-quality instruction.

What the school needs to improve

- Increase the percentage of students reaching Level 4 by continuing to set clear goals and regularly monitor the progress towards these.
- Analyze the achievement of boys and girls rigorously to spot any inconsistencies and amend instruction if necessary.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

At the heart of this successful school lies a real commitment to the individual child and providing what each one needs to experience success. Students' achievements are recognized and celebrated and this is a key feature in ensuring that they develop confidence and motivation, striving every day to learn more and more. Students enjoy school and appreciate all the experiences that it offers. "Teachers make learning fun and that is why I like school" remarked one student. Another described her positive attitude to mathematics, saying, "I have a lot of problems with math but I still love it." Parents appreciate all the school does for their children and how they are encouraged to be active partners in the learning process. They particularly value the principal's open and welcoming approach, which helps newcomers quickly feel part of the "PS 255 family."

The curriculum is rich and varied. The administration has been careful to ensure that all aspects of a child's development are considered within the learning process. For example, a strong emphasis on the arts results in students developing creativity and imagination as well as providing an excellent vehicle to cultivate literacy skills.

Like the children, the teachers receive strong encouragement. Their contributions are valued highly by the administration and they regularly receive recognition and praise. They are held accountable for their students' performance and are given the tools they need to carry out the job to a high standard. Classes are small, resources are plentiful and teachers enjoy strong support from coaches and the administration. They provide high-quality instruction and as a result most students achieve at a high level in every grade. Special education students are nurtured and helped to grow academically and personally. As the school motto says, 'Every child is a star at PS255.'

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.

A tremendous amount of data is collected about the performance of individual students, classes and grades and this is used effectively to drive the school's work. Assessments begin in pre-kindergarten where students' early skills and aptitudes are evaluated and the information used for class groupings. Most grades have general education classes, an Eagle class for the most able students and an inclusion class which contains general and special education students. These grouping strategies work very effectively as teachers are experienced and skilled at providing instruction at different levels. There are also self-contained English language learners' classes in several grades to immerse students in English language and help them develop fluency and confidence quickly. Special education classes contain students from different grades who are at similar levels in their academic and social development. They receive a great deal of individual and small group instruction, which ensures they make rapid progress—some reaching Level 3 in mathematics.

The school is very conscious of its performance compared with other schools in the City, although it relies more on the data it generates itself to inform decisions regarding instruction. Test scores are significantly higher than in other schools, especially in English language arts. The school is not complacent however, and correctly identifies moving more students on to Level 4 as its next priority. Although assessment data has been analyzed carefully to spot any individual underachievement, less attention has been paid to analysis by gender. Currently girls perform at a higher level than boys and this may be an area worth examining more closely.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The school enjoys extremely warm and supportive relationships with parents, who are active partners in their children’s learning. Family events such as the Film Evenings strengthen these relationships and workshops for parents help them to understand how to support their children at home. Students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are welcomed and parents are quickly engaged in the learning process. Language is not a barrier—interpreters are readily available. The City’s “Learning Leaders” program prepares parent volunteers to help in classrooms, often providing invaluable support for English language learners in their home language.

Students’ views and ideas are valued. They are confident to express any concerns to school staff, one student noting that he would “go straight to the principal” if he had a problem. This indicates the warmth of the relationship that every child has with the principal. She is on hand morning and afternoon to welcome and say goodbye to students and chat with parents. Tardiness is not acceptable and only a handful of students arrive late. Attendance is above that of similar and City schools and continues to improve. Students want to come to school. One parent remarked, “If we want to punish our kids, we tell them they can’t come to school.”

Students know what they must do to improve. Lessons always begin with teachers sharing what they are going to teach. This is reviewed at the end so that students can judge how well they have done. Writing rubrics are displayed prominently in every classroom and students refer to these when working on their assignments. Teachers provide very helpful comments on students’ work, recognizing their efforts and providing clear pointers for improvement.

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 curriculum offered to students is exciting and relevant to their needs and interests. The arts are used successfully to encourage the development of reading and writing. A “Making Books Sing” program gives students the opportunity to adapt a children’s book into an imaginative script, then perform it for each other. “Studio in School” is a project in

which the school's existing strengths in art are supplemented by visiting professionals who work with every class, supporting skills development in different media. English language learners receive an extra session every week to stimulate vocabulary and fluency. A great deal of work is done to raise funds to provide these valuable experiences. The impact is evident in students' high English language arts scores.

The school's strong teaching practices lead to gains in student achievement. Teachers are deployed according to experience and expertise and this helps new teachers to settle in quickly and learn from their colleagues. The high priority given to meeting individual requirements is at its strongest in the classroom setting where students are grouped and taught according to needs. These groupings change depending on what is being taught so that students get exactly what they need to help them take the next steps in their learning. This results in high levels of engagement and interest and very few behavior 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 principal expects 100 per cent effort from everyone—staff and students. Teachers are held accountable for their students' performance on annual tests and their progress towards these is checked rigorously throughout the year. Similarly, the quality of instruction is monitored to see where it might be improved. Lessons are observed and students' work analyzed to assess the impact of the instruction. Assistant principals play an effective role in this, taking responsibility for different areas of the school. Teachers appreciate all the support they are given and the many ways in which their work is valued. Personal letters from the principal, congratulatory messages over the intercom as well as small informal words of thanks make them feel proud of their work and increase their commitment to the school.

Teachers have plentiful opportunities for professional development. For example, regular meetings between new teachers and instructional coaches help teachers develop effective strategies for classroom management, and provide a useful forum for them to share ideas with one another. They also have regular opportunities to watch lead teachers and learn from their expertise.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

Many different teams work at different levels to check how students are doing. Regular grade-level meetings review individual students' progress and, if necessary, students are moved to a more appropriate setting within the school. A range of professionals including guidance counselors and social workers meet weekly with the senior leadership team to review the progress of students most at risk, making informed decisions about future action. The administration is not afraid to challenge convention to ensure that they secure the best possible services for children.

The school uses a wide range of interventions to help students who are struggling. Throughout the school, at the end of the day, small groups can be seen huddled in corners, receiving concentrated instruction from teachers and paraprofessionals. The smiles on their faces and their involvement in the activities show their obvious enjoyment.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Barbara Reing School (PS 255)	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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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