



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Benjamin Banneker

Public School 256

**114 Kosciusko Street
Brooklyn
NY 11216**

Principal: Sharyn Hemphill

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Reviewer: Jill Bavin

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Benjamin Banneker School is an elementary school with approximately 440 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. Ninety-two percent of the students are Black and 8% are Hispanic. Most of the Hispanic students are English language learners. There are four self-contained classes for the 44 special education students.

The principal has been in an interim acting role for the last two years, having previously held the assistant principal role within the school. School development was difficult during the first year of her interim acting principal role because the cabinet and staff believed that the previous principal could return at any time. Over the last year the interim acting principal, hereafter referred to as principal, has made her own analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses and established an effective action plan for school improvement. Students' achievements have risen steadily over recent years. These achievements, and the rate of student attendance, have continued to rise over the last two years.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has produced a very focused action plan, with clear, measurable academic targets aimed at accelerating student achievement.
- The principal knows her staff very well, and selects and assigns staff astutely reflecting her high expectations of staff and students.
- The principal has led a period of improved instruction and continued rise in student achievements.
- There is much constructive teamwork in the school, where the majority of teachers are willing to help each other and to continue to learn new skills.
- Most students are interested and engaged most of the time.
- Students feel safe in school and know that staff care about them.
- Well-developed professional development is clearly focused on school goals and also geared to meeting individual teacher's needs.
- Students know that the principal and most staff have high expectations of them.
- The school reaches out to parents, actively seeking to work in partnership with them, and over the last two years student attendance has improved.
- There are examples of very good instruction within the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to raise students' achievement in English, mathematics and science.
- Formalize and extend the analysis of how well students are doing to include more groups of students, such as by ethnicity.
- Explore programs that would help the school to align the curriculum more closely to the needs and interests of students, for example by planning for, and making more, consistent links between subjects.
- Make more direct links between teachers' assessment information and short term student goals, for example, through sharing rubrics with students.
- Strengthen systems that would share and extend examples of the best instructional practice in the school.
- Strengthen systems to ensure that students' previous skills are systematically developed, and any continuing weaknesses are systematically addressed, as they move through the school.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The principal is respected by staff for managing the school smoothly on a day to day basis, for maintaining the good will of most staff, for cultivating a positive culture of warm and friendly relationships between staff and students, and for demonstrating good instructional skills. In difficult circumstances she has begun to accelerate the school's developments, keeping most of the staff onboard, and helping students' achievements to continue to rise. She has placed a strong and crucial emphasis upon improving instruction practice, recognizing that this is the key factor in raising students' achievements. Although overall students do not achieve as well as in other City schools, there is a steady upward trend in results.

The principal and cabinet have a very good understanding of how well different groups of students make progress. They are using this very effectively to address where there are weaknesses in teaching and there is some good use of data to identify specific priorities for continued improvement of student achievement. In spite of the school's best efforts it is a minority of parents who work in partnership with them, for example by attending their subject workshops and parent/teacher conferences. Nevertheless, student attendance has improved recently and is now closer to City averages.

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 cabinet use the data at their disposal well to maintain an up-to-date view of how well different students are doing. They maintain a close comparison between classes and grades, as well as checking boys' progress in reading and writing, which has been a recent area of school focus. The school collects a wide range of data to assess students' skills, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers are increasingly sharing information to compare how well students are doing in different classes and to determine what works best for the students. This means that teachers have a good understanding of how well different groups of students are doing, although the school is just beginning to extrapolate data according to ethnicity.

Most importantly, teachers and grade leaders are analyzing test results to find the most common errors and adjust subsequent planning to fill any previous gaps. The principal and the cabinet carefully scrutinize teachers' data and so discover whether students in each class and grade level are making the progress they should. This analysis, which has been shared with faculty, reveals that the school has had particular success in moving students from Level 2 to Level 3. The principal places a strong emphasis on looking at which students could be lifted to a higher level with an extra focus from the teacher or school, whether it is from Level 1 to 2, 2 to 3 or 3 to 4. It also reveals where instruction is

weaker and helps focus staff development programs. The principal and cabinet have a clear understanding of the school's performance in comparison with similar local schools and City school. They maintain close links with neighboring schools in order to deepen their understanding of why there are similarities and differences. Because the principal is constantly sharing information and asking pertinent questions of staff the vast majority are working hard to raise academic achievements.

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.

Following consultation with teachers the principal makes good use of this data to compile an overview of students' progress and to set challenging but realistic targets for improved achievement. This is a key feature of the steady upward trend in the last couple of years' test results. It is too soon for her to have had time to update and revise these targets but because the goals are clearly stated, she is in a good position to do so. School data indicates that students are on track for higher results again this year and reflect how closely the school is tracking student progress.

The principal is constantly seeking to improve instruction as a result of her data analysis. Her close analysis of instruction aligned with her inter-grade and inter-class comparisons, mean that she knows that the quality of instruction has improved, but her passion for the best for the students means she is far from complacent. The vital link between using data to improve students' achievement and the quality of instruction remain strong in all that she does and applies equally to all students. The principal closely tracks students taking alternative assessments. She has a secure understanding of the progress of Hispanic students, most of whom are English language learners, but this understanding is not formally analyzed. Teachers make sensible use of all this information to check on student progress and recommend students for suitable intervention programs.

The school increasingly focuses on those students in greatest need of improvement, whatever their academic level. However, teachers do not routinely share goals with students and miss opportunities to clearly identify for students what they have achieved and what they need to do to raise the level on specific pieces of work. Nevertheless the culture of improvement is having a significant effect on all members of the school community, and is widening among staff all the time.

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 curriculum has recently been aligned to address those areas of weakness emerging from the school's item analysis of test results. For example, the school identified that reading skills and a lack of confidence with specific vocabulary, were impeding students' success in mathematics. Consequently, there has been a whole school drive to ensure that as many students as possible recognize and understand key vocabulary vital to the mathematics tests. With the recent appointment of a new art teacher the curriculum has

been enriched this year by regular art lessons and links between art and other subjects such as social studies. For example, students were enthused by making 'cobble stones' to support work on 'Old New York'. However, links between other subjects are rare and the school is not making regular use of themes to add interest to students' learning. Most teachers plan interesting lessons with a shared introduction and small group work designed to help pupils working at different levels. However, further work is required by some to increase challenge for students by make better links between the work they set and what students need to do next. Most students are engaged most of the time, but this is very dependent on the quality of instruction they are receiving.

Staff are very carefully hired, and assigned, to ensure the best possible impact on student achievement. Curriculum time and other resources are allocated in response to a careful analysis of student and teacher need. The principal's close use of data means that teachers are held very closely to account for the progress of the students they work with. The school does its best to work with parents and convey the importance of regular attendance. Not all parents are diligent in helping them to attend, especially the early morning intervention sessions. Nevertheless, while still below the City average, attendance rates are improving. Students are increasingly enjoying school. They appreciate that adults are working to help them and they fee safe and respected within the school environment.

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.

Over the last year the principal has hired a literacy coach and an art teacher new to the school. Rigorous selection processes have contributed to the success of these new additions to the staff. A new mathematics coach has been hired within the school, and both coaches are playing a significant role in the professional development available to staff. They are already having a positive impact in helping to share best practice, enhance teachers' confidence and most importantly contributing to a stronger school culture of professional dialogue and continuing improvement. The school is also making good use of outside groups, such as Columbia University Teachers College and the 'Aussies' program to improve instruction. Staff have a much clearer idea now of how to plan and structure lessons that meet all their students' needs, and have good opportunities to share ideas about what works well in lessons. Most importantly, professional development reflects a balance of what the school needs to do to reach its academic goals, increase teacher interest, and develop shared activities and individual activities that are suited to the needs of individual teachers. Teachers are increasingly observing each other but are not yet adept at giving each other constructive criticism. However, the principal regularly and frequently gives teachers helpful feedback on what she sees. Other members of the cabinet contribute well to this process. The school runs smoothly on a day to day basis.

Improved team work in the school means that grade teachers share planning and ideas for instruction at weekly meetings and this is evident in the consistency of useful displays to aid learning in most classrooms. The principal has rightly identified that the next step is closer teamwork from one grade to another to increase teachers' understanding of what students have already done and what they must be aiming for. The school makes good use of other community groups to help support families and so reduce barriers to students' learning. The principal has begun to network with New York University in order to bring good quality support into classrooms, and to further enhance opportunities for strong

appointments in the future. The principal is respected by the school community for the developments she has led which clearly demonstrate her capacity to lead further school improvement.

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.

This is a school with recently re-energized and effective systems for objective planning, increased accountability and a greater strategic view for improving students' performance and achievement. The principal is passionate about giving students the best possible start to their education. She is driven by Aristotle's maxim, 'We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is then, not an act, but a habit.' This statement is displayed liberally around the school. This feeds the school's sound and increasing focus on planning and regular assessments about how well they are progressing in improving student achievement. The principal is keenly aware of the need to continue to raise student achievement and improve the quality of teaching in the school. Her message is strong, consistent and equally applied to all staff and students. This is reflected in a thoughtful action plan, which forms part of her Comprehensive Education Plan, based on student data and realistic but challenging aspirations. This supplementary plan means the school is now in a good position to monitor, evaluate and revise within the academic year.

Comparative data is monitored closely by the principal and the cabinet. When shortcomings are identified, relevant, well-chosen action is taken to remedy the issues. This has contributed to the uninterrupted increase in student achievements in spite of the changes to school leadership and the initial uncertainty surrounding the arrangements for the school. The school is growing in productive and constructive cohesion. The cabinet knows the school's areas of strength and weakness very well. They are very aware that there are examples of very good teaching in the school and their continuing priority is to raise achievement more by improving instruction further.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Benjamin Banneker (PS 256)	∅	✓	+
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	