



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Joseph B. Cavallaro School

Intermediate School 281

**8787 24th Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11214**

Principal: Stephen Rosenblum

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Reviewer: Stephen M. Drakes

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Joseph B. Cavallaro School has a student population of 1,286 students in grades 6 through 8. The school's ethnic composition consists of 35.1% White, 32.2% Asian, 18.7% Hispanic and 13.5% Black students. The school receives Title I funding. Approximately 12% of students are English language learners and 13% are special education students. Chinese dialects, Spanish, Urdu and Russian are some of the languages spoken in the home of students recently arrived into the country. The number of English language learners and special education students has risen in the past year. Student attendance, at 92.9%, was better than in similar and City schools in 2005.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The administration, teachers and support staff have put into place effective mechanisms to measure and analyze student performance on an ongoing basis.
- Teachers use data well to modify the curriculum and to create differentiated instructional approaches.
- The school community utilizes an engaging and interactive curriculum that meets the needs of all students.
- Technology is thoroughly integrated into classroom instruction to support learning.
- The school has developed an extensive menu of academic intervention strategies to meet the needs of its low performing students.
- Teachers enthusiastically engage in collaborative planning and sharing of best practices.
- Administrators and teachers regularly take advantage of a wide variety of professional development opportunities to improve their practice.
- All stakeholders in the school community are embraced, valued and supported by its members creating a true partnership and sense of team.
- A wide range of enrichment activities enable students to strengthen their academic skills, as well as engage in real-world applications of learned concepts.
- The school community is a highly organized place where there is a great sense of mutual respect amongst administrators, teachers, support staff and students.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop ways to support the academic progress of the small student sub-groups.
- Increase the proficiency of a few teachers in monitoring student progress, setting student achievement goals and differentiating their instruction.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The current principal and staff have created a “family-like” environment within the school so that it is totally inclusive of all of its members. While there are over 1200 students and over 80 faculty members, everyone knows everyone else. Students don’t get “lost in the cracks”. There is sharing and effective communication taking place at all levels, centered on the students. There is respect for all. Students are focused and come to school ready to learn. The assistant principals and coaches work well with the teachers and provide them with a plethora of valuable professional development opportunities. Funds have been used to reduce the average class size. Instruction is active, interactive and thoroughly engaging for students. Technology is successfully integrated into the instructional program, with classrooms well-equipped with smart boards and personal computers.

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.

At the beginning of each school year teachers are provided with standardized test scores that they use as baselines for each student. During the year they use a variety of teacher designed interim assessment tools to monitor student progress and to isolate areas of weakness. These tools range from standardized to customized school based instruments. Staff monitor student progress on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. Class and individual student assessment binders are maintained by most teachers. The engaging “Brain Pop” software is used in all disciplines to motivate students and to produce interim sources of student progress data. The administration and the school improvement/data team oversee and monitor data that is produced in each class and help in its interpretation. In this way the school maintains an updated picture of student performance, which can be used to compare progress across classes, grades and key student groups.

The staff, overwhelmingly, uses data to support its decision-making. Throughout the year data usage, the importance of data and how to use data to meet students’ needs through instruction and monitoring are discussed at faculty conferences, department conferences, grade meetings and in one-to-one conferences between teachers and their assistant principals and/or coaches. The administration continues to work at getting all teachers fully proficient in the use of data to monitor student progress. The school studies its data over time and uses this information to create preemptive programs to assure steady growth and to prevent performance decline in the general population and within subgroups. Comparisons are made with similar and City schools when judging overall effectiveness.

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.

Intermediate School 281 is a school where there are high expectations for all – staff members as well as students. These expectations are clearly articulated and high student achievement is aggressively sought. Long and short range goals supporting these expectations are outlined in the school’s Comprehensive Education Plan. These are communicated well to the school community and so goals and plans for improving student performance drive the actions of all concerned.

Once students’ performance levels are identified, strategies are put into motion to increase these levels of performance. The principal, assistant principals, coaches and teachers confer to create a plan to address student needs. Teachers and administrators meet on a regular basis to discuss teaching strategies and student achievement at department meetings, grade meetings and faculty conferences. Collaborative decisions are made regarding differentiated instruction, academic interventions and enrichment for groups and individual students. Consequently, much attention is paid to meeting the needs of those students most requiring improvement. The school has developed an extensive menu of academic intervention strategies to meet the needs of its low performing students. Both students and their parents are kept fully aware of progress and are involved in conversations concerning appropriate academic interventions and the associated goals.

The school maintains ongoing communication with the students’ parents. This outreach sometimes uncovers issues that impact on student learning. The principal has also instituted programs that address any concerns that arise from parents. This connection is enabling parents to better support their child’s learning.

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 makes creative use of the mandated curriculum, supported by supplemental materials and delivered by way of technology. Students and teachers are deeply immersed in a technology rich environment. Students in grades 6 and 7 have their own tablet computers. There are 39 classrooms equipped with smart boards for interactive lesson presentations. Extensive after school and Saturday school academic intervention services support students well. The extended day program allows students to meet with teachers in small groups. After school enrichment programs are offered to students who are meeting the standards to provide additional challenges and stimuli. Cross- and extra-curricular activities effectively reinforce concepts learned in the classroom. Examples include a journalism program that produces the school newspaper, the graphic arts program that produces all of the in-house printing materials, the media program that operates the school’s professional television studio and the scholar’s academy that enables students to complete up to three Regents courses.

Teachers are held accountable for the quality of their instruction and resulting student outcomes. They adjust the curriculum and differentiate instruction well to meet the needs of students based on the outcomes of interim assessments. Students are engaged and challenged as a result. The academic intervention team and the school improvement planning/data teams assist teachers with differentiated instruction strategies. However, the administration continues to work at getting all teachers fully proficient in the use of data to differentiate instruction.

The administration makes budgeting and staffing decisions based on particular needs that are revealed in collected data. The principal, cabinet and coaches have done a great deal to align instruction and resources to address the needs of the students. Additional teachers have been hired in critical areas including English language arts, English as a second language and mathematics. This move has helped to reduce class size across the board. The school has addressed the needs of its “at risk” population by staffing and scheduling decisions which make creative use of teachers’ time. For example, four teachers are assigned to three classes. These teachers thus work collaboratively assisting students who are weak academically.

Staff know students well. Student attendance is consistently high. This can be attributed, in part, to its exciting curriculum. The school also has effective mechanisms in place that keep parents informed of student attendance and of any work missed.

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 fills teacher vacancies with candidates who believe in the school’s philosophy, have high expectations and are driven to help students reach their academic potential. To support the teaching staff the administration has prepared an extensive professional development program. A comprehensive professional development workshop is offered during the summer to instruct teachers on the proper use of technology in the classroom. The assistant principals and coaches have crafted ongoing staff development throughout the year. Workshop presentations are made at faculty and department conferences. The principal encourages teachers to participate in professional development with external providers.

The desire to offer the best instructional product to all students has motivated many teachers to engage in informal meetings, ‘peer-shares’, inter-visitations and ‘lunch and learns’. The principal also supports these important exchanges by programming many teachers with common preparation periods. These teacher meetings, as well as the formal department, grade and faculty meetings, enable teachers to examine data in a collaborative way and produce strategies as teams that meet the needs of students.

Teachers feel valued and supported by the principal and the cabinet. They are encouraged in their teaching and given the supplies and materials necessary to be successful in the classroom. The administration models the collaborative spirit and supports teachers as they invest their own time, before and after school, in their own learning. The principal and cabinet visit classes often. Teachers look forward to these formal and informal visits, the constructive feedback that is shared and the strategies for improved student performance that is a result of post-observation conferences.

The principal has an open-door policy that promotes communication and permits the exchange of ideas. Faculty and students alike feel comfortable approaching the principal with concerns and issues large and small. The principal is highly respected by the school community, who recognize that he has a very high capacity to continue to effect change. This is a highly organized school, where routines and procedures are consistently followed. There is a great sense of mutual respect amongst administrators, teachers, support staff and students. The Neighborhood Improvement Association provides much valued after school activities for students, which include sports, arts and crafts, homework help and community service. All stakeholders are embraced, valued and supported in creating a true partnership and sense of team.

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.

The school's Comprehensive Educational Plan is used effectively along with the curriculum assessments to evaluate and revise instructional practice. Teachers work together by department to evaluate and revise the plan. Teachers are also presented with the school's report card to evaluate progress toward meeting the school's goals.

The school makes important decisions regarding instructional approaches using a wide range of student performance data. When it is determined through monitoring that an approach is not working, the administrative team and teachers devise alternative approaches. The school staff stands ready to adapt any student's program to accommodate the appropriate academic intervention strategy to promote learning. Teachers and support staff are constantly engaged in examining student outcomes and comparing results across the grades and from grade to grade. Observations are used to make pertinent decisions regarding revisions in plans, strategies and next steps for all students. The school has mechanisms in place to monitor and revise all aspects of its academic program.

A good example of the school's ability to respond flexibly and decisively to accelerate student learning is exemplified by English language learners in their mathematics class. Analysis showed that these students were not doing as well as expected in tests because they did not understand the technical vocabulary being used in the word problems. The successful solution was to have the principal hire a 'no status' teacher to help these students with English as it relates to mathematics. The school recognizes the need to continue to improve its support for identified sub-groups of students.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Joseph B. Cavallaro School (IS 281)	∅	✓	+
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