



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Meyer Levin School

Intermediate School 285

**5909 Beverly Road
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Eddie Gentile

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Reviewer: Andy McClean

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well
What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation
How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school:

Meyer Levin School is a performing arts middle school for grades 6 through 8, located in a locality with a mixed and vibrant community. The number of students enrolled is just over 1000 and parents regard it as an educational establishment that provides a springboard for their children to move onto higher things. Approximately 70% of students have Title 1 eligibility. Virtually all are Black with significant numbers being very proud of their links with many islands of the Caribbean. The number of English language learners and special education students is low. Attendance is above average when compared with similar schools and across the City.

One of the most significant aspects of the school is their wide-ranging performing arts program with opportunities for all students to participate in the steel pan band, the brass band and chorus, all of which perform regularly both in school for parents and in the local community.

Trips to Europe are also a regular feature with parents and students traveling to France and Spain last year, and a trip to Greece and Italy planned for this year. As well as having successes in these areas, student performance in the core subjects of English language arts and mathematics is well above that of similar schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Strong minded and inspirational leadership is given by the very reflective principal.
- The excellent team spirit of all staff concentrates on providing all students with opportunities to succeed.
- There is a wide variety of performing arts activities and is a culture of celebration that makes learning fun.
- Detailed use of professional development enhances teachers' understanding of best instructional practices.
- A wide variety of questioning is used to draw out students' understanding of their work.
- The best teaching is typified by detailed planning, a great deal of student interaction and challenging activities.
- Budget decisions are made which deliver the best possible support for teachers and students.
- The school provides a curriculum that seeks to provide all students with opportunities to celebrate their gifts and talents.
- Detailed analysis of both results and instructional practice is carried out effectively by both the administration and teachers.
- Insistence on high standards of behavior leads to a safe and lively school community.

What the school needs to improve

- Devise programs to improve boys' performance and bring it up to the level of girls' achievement in English language arts.
- Expand the use of technology throughout the school.
- Improve the evaluation of action plans outlined in the Comprehensive Education Plan, reflect on why results and practices have been successful in recent years, and use the conclusions to address present and future challenges.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The whole school community works together to make sure that all students are fully included in the wide range of activities that it provides. Data is very well used to measure students' baseline knowledge and to track progress. High expectations for both academic performance and student cooperation are well-established aspects of the school culture. Teachers, including the principal, assistant principals and other senior teachers exude a positive, 'can do' attitude and are very visible around the school. Students want to be there to participate in the many and varied activities, such as music, drama and dance which are a regular part of the daily life of the school. Students enjoy their school, respect it and take care of the environment. There is academic rigor underlying all school programs and the school adds great value to students' lives in preparing them for their futures. Parents play an important part in the life of the school, are welcomed to participate in all activities. They hold the principal and teachers to account on a regular basis.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

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

The school has very well-developed systems for the collection of data relating to both individuals and groups of students. Such information is used to inform all teachers, especially those with English language learners and special education students, of particular challenges. Regular testing of students produces a wealth of data that is analyzed by the administration and translated into understandable goals for teachers. These are then used by teachers, in collaboration with administrators, to formulate plans and programs of instruction.

There is awareness among staff, guided by the principal's firm grasp of school data, of what challenges the school must tackle, such as the need to improve results of boys in English language arts and to expand the use of technology throughout the school.

Intervention programs for special education students are regularly upgraded and assessed. Teachers reflect deeply upon the performance of individuals and groups. Discussions of individual students' needs are carried out with great academic rigor, and make good use of data collected over a significant period. This has led to all teachers being made aware of the need to provide greater differentiation in their classes.

The principal and assistant principals constantly check the school's performance against that of similar schools, which is well above that of their peers. They also meet regularly to use the data generated to plan for future actions. The school plans to spend more of the time available to analyze what has led to improved performance and to use this information when tackling areas for improvement.

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.

All members of staff, starting with the principal, communicate well with the students. The principal and his administrators are highly visible around the school, where all benefit from their support. The cabinet meets regularly to review progress. The Comprehensive Education Plan is constructed through consultation with the school leadership team, allowing parents, students and teachers to participate. This plan, while very detailed, lacks an element of evaluation of progress against school goals and is chiefly concerned with percentage gains in test results rather than any analysis of pedagogical success.

There are very strong links with parents. Good communication keeps them well informed of test results, their child’s progress, homework requirements and future school events. Regular meetings are held at which teachers discuss with parents how individuals are progressing, what their next targets are and how to improve performance. The school uses data from tests to identify students needing extra help and what programs can be used to support them, particularly in English language arts. Workshops for parents engage them in the school culture of supporting students in every way to help them make the best possible progress. Teachers in all grades meet regularly to plan, align instruction and check data enabling them to address specific academic targets. Such is the open attitude of all staff to learn from their colleagues, that there is frequent and fruitful debate on successful instructional methods, contributing to the school’s good test results.

Because of the exciting opportunities offered to all students in the performing arts, teachers regularly plan together to link music and drama to the core curriculum. Regular performances are a key feature of life in Meyer Levin. They are used as goals to measure students’ performance in relation to confidence and teamwork, as well as presenting excellent opportunities to use the core skills of speaking and listening in a real life context.

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.

Teachers have a clear idea of the main priorities for raising standards. From the data assimilated, and by comparisons with the performance of similar schools, the school’s instructional team concentrates on the core subjects of English language arts and mathematics. Science is also a subject that is in good standing because students have practical opportunities to develop their understanding of the subject.

There is an expectation in every class that students participate actively. Learning objectives are highlighted helpfully at the start and assessed at the end of the lesson. Students are given an outline of what they will be expected to have achieved and teachers provide feedback both during and at the end of each lesson, enabling students to refocus on the next stage of learning. All teachers encourage students to answer in full sentences and explain their reasoning in keeping with the culture of effective performing arts schools that seek to develop students’ skills of speaking and listening. This results in students who know what they are learning and why, and promotes student engagement.

The breadth and balance of the curriculum is impressive. Students talk with great enthusiasm about their band and performance experiences. Within these activities students of different ages and aptitudes work as very effective teams to move towards the school's goals of developing the whole person and giving them experiences that will enhance their ability to live successfully in modern society. Indeed, students who have traveled on school trips abroad articulate wonderful memories of meeting and living in different cultures and experiencing the varied food of Europe!

Budgeting decisions are taken after consultation with staff and parents. A very good example of such a decision by the principal is the employment of extra staff to address the emotional and social problems of a significant number of students. Teachers know their students well. There is a mutual respect because students understand that their teachers are working to provide them with the best education possible. This results in students attending regularly, behaving well and thoroughly enjoying their time in school. Increased rates of attendance have also resulted from an automated messaging service to inform parents of their children's absence.

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 has a very clear understanding of the need to raise standards in English language arts and mathematics. The school is also aware of the need to improve teachers' technology skills to make best use of the resources available in school. Regular and focused lesson observations throughout the school by the principal, his assistant principals and coaches provide hard evidence as to where professional development is needed for specific teachers and in specific subjects. As a result of these observations and the use of data from tests, there is a clear direction set within the Comprehensive Education Plan.

Teachers have regular opportunities to plan together, to align their programs of instruction and to meet with other teachers in the same grade in order to compare standards of work within subjects. Because of the school's high expectations in performing arts, teachers and students have great team spirit, as evidenced in one outstanding dance class where students and their teacher modeled dance steps and sequences without inhibition. Indeed, a significant feature in accelerating the learning of each student is the school's insistence that students learn from each other, whether in core subjects or the arts.

The principal is known and respected by all students, staff and parents. He is a very good listener and makes decisions based on the premise that his role is to drive standards forward. In this respect, the opinions of all parties are scrutinized and weighed before decisions are made. Sometimes these are not popular, but they always are in the students' best interests.

Well-established day-to-day systems enable the school to run smoothly and make it a secure, safe and exciting place to be. Students and staff devote a great deal of extra time to developing the school culture of hard work.

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 with some well-developed features.

The leadership of the school is outstanding. The principal has excellent management and communication skills. Plans and goals for the school are discussed, analyzed and reviewed on a regular basis involving senior staff, parents and students.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is a well-developed document, which performs all its required functions. There are regular milestones within plans that measure the school's standards and progress against test performance. What is not present is regular and detailed evaluation of progress against the actions outlined in particular aspects of the plan. While the principal and assistant principals are aware of the need to address this important task, at present they do not devote enough time to analyzing their successes and areas that are in need of development.

Data shows that throughout the school in English language arts, boys' performance lags behind that of girls. An opportunity for all staff, led by literacy experts within the school, to address this challenge has already been planned and the school librarian, in consultation with senior staff, has made great efforts to provide boy-friendly reading material. As a result boys within the school are beginning to enjoy reading and show greater interest. Administrators are aware of the challenge ahead and the plan has been amended to focus teachers' attention on raising boys' achievement.

There is a culture in Meyer Levin of support for all. Staff, students and parents have a single goal in common. It is to ensure that by using data from school tests and all other sources, the potential of all students is identified at an early stage, programs of instruction are taught with expertise and enthusiasm and that individual students make the best progress possible. This does not just mean academic progress. All staff, with a determined lead from the principal, do their utmost to develop the talents of students and to ensure that they mature into caring members of society.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Meyer Levin School (IS 285)	∅	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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	