



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

William Penn School

Public School 321

**180 7 Avenue
New York
NY 11215**

Principal: Elizabeth Philips

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Reviewer: Joan L. Johnston

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

The William Penn School, PS 321, is located in the Park Slope area of Brooklyn and has 1262 students enrolled in pre-kindergarten through grade 5. Recent statistics for the school indicate that 60% of the students are White, 19% Black, 16% Hispanic and 5% Asian and other ethnicities. Approximately 10% are special education students and 3% are English language learners, both proportions smaller than City averages.

The school does not receive Title I funding. Attendance figures, at 94%, are broadly the same as similar schools and close to the City-wide average.

The school was identified as an Empowerment School in summer 2006. As an Empowerment School, the school has more flexibility to make key decisions and control resources for their school community. Empowerment Schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements. It is in its first year of implementing identified initiatives.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The leadership strengths of the principal have led to sustained and systemic progress in the school.
- The school has used its resources as an Empowerment School to enhance its capacity to meet the learning needs of students and the professional growth of faculty.
- Teachers are accountable for students' achievement and effectively use classroom data to guide instruction.
- Academic intervention and student support services are focused well on the needs of individual learners.
- An enriched curriculum is aligned with State learning standards and assessments.
- Parental involvement is integrated well into the fabric of the school.
- The school embraces a continuous improvement model and fosters the growth of a lifelong learning community.
- Partnerships with cultural and community organizations, and with educational institutions help to sustain a robust learning environment.

What the school needs to improve

- Sustain the multi-cultural focus at the school to maintain the vibrant community that prepares students for a global society.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school-based support team in their collaboration with the pupil personnel committee.
- Continue to plan and provide effectively for the professional growth of faculty to accomplish identified next level goals as an Empowerment School.
- Implement a data tracking system that allows for improved access to State testing and interim assessment results for all student groups.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school.

The William Penn School is a thriving school. Parents, students, and faculty work as a collaborative team to place learning at the center of the school. The principal is a highly regarded leader who is dedicated to the success of her school. Her leadership has been both purposeful and visionary. Her knowledge of curriculum and instruction has led to higher standards and greater student achievement. The assistant principals help to assure that the school is well run and that goals are accomplished.

Over time, numerous effective partnerships have been developed with parents, cultural organizations and community groups. Parents are actively involved in the school and their contributions are valued. A long-standing collaboration with Columbia University provides professional development that is sustained and systemic in literacy. Students are encouraged to develop an interest in serving the greater community by participating in service learning options and fund raising activities that develop responsibility and foster contribution.

As a first year Empowerment School, the school community is in the process of formulating goals that will take it to the next level. Plans include an evaluation of current systems and increased use of technology to manage data and instructional applications. The recent designation as an Empowerment School has led to developing a design your own initiative involving periodic assessments in literacy.. Very effective use is made of the data gleaned from these assessments and from individual conferencing with students to provide additional support or enrichment.

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 school-wide level and in each individual classroom, an exhaustive collection of data are gathered and reviewed to monitor student progress. In addition to State and City-wide reports, interim assessment reports and classroom-generated data provide a detailed picture of individual student performance. Teachers maintain classroom folders that carefully track progress through reading logs, writing tasks, mathematics units, and conferencing note logs. Each student has a homework folder that allows parents to monitor the progress of their children and to maintain close contact with the classroom teacher. The principal and assistant principals closely monitor this information. For example, the principal collects and reviews the reading level progress charts that track the growth in reading of each student three times a year.

Data are used effectively to ensure special education students and English language learners receive individualized attention and support based on their needs. While the school is interested in the performance of sub-groups in comparison to school wide averages, they prefer to take a more holistic approach to assessing individual student

progress. Students of all ethnic groups not progressing at the classroom level are referred to a student assistance team for an assessment meeting that includes the classroom teacher, guidance counselor and an assistant principal. After that, a reporting process begins that tracks the progress of additional supports that may include parent meetings, guidance support or related services in addition to academic monitoring. However, the school does not yet have a data tracking system in place that allows for improved access to State testing and interim assessment results for all student groups.

The school benchmarks its performance with the City schools who rank above and below them in performance across a variety of measures, including whole school and grade level subject performance.

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 places a strong emphasis on collaborative planning and goal setting. The school leadership team reviews annual performance data and develops the Comprehensive Education Plan after consulting selected school community members. During discussions, the principal highlights specific goals for the coming year. A detailed plan outlines specific strategies the school intends to use to achieve each goal, the timeframe for when the goals will be met and how progress will be measured, monitored and evaluated. For example, a current goal involves improving instruction and learning in mathematics through a more balanced mathematic approach. An assistant principal is overseeing this goal and mathematics leaders at each grade have been appointed, pacing calendars developed and reviewed, and intervention services targeted to the needs of individual students who are not achieving. Workshops have taken place that focus on this approach and to show parents how they can effectively support what is happening in the classroom.

Effective focus is given to all students in greatest need of improvement including special education students, English language learners and those in danger of not meeting grade standards. For example, as part of an action research study, a team of faculty and administrators analyzed why a group of third grade students was struggling. Subsequent intervention strategies were implemented at an earlier stage and so prevented ongoing difficulties.

The principal conveys her high expectations to faculty and parents in a variety of ways. Through one-on-one meetings with each staff member at the beginning of the year, the principal sets priority areas and goals to improve teaching and learning in the classrooms. At the end of the year, each teacher’s reflection on the year includes areas of progress and areas still in need of improvement. On the first Friday of each month, parents attend the first period of the school day with their child in a program known as Parents as Learning Partners. Here they are actively engaged in learning along with their child in a variety of areas and learn about their children’s goals and the school’s expectations.

The school staff is dedicated to developing solutions that will improve instruction, student achievement, and home-school communication. For example, the parent coordinator now runs parent group meetings for Spanish and Arabic speaking parents to more fully involve them in their children’s learning. However, while the school has systems in place to

ensure support is given to those students who need it, not all support staff are able to get together regularly to discuss needs across the various services.

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 has a well thought out and long-standing plan for aligning curriculum and instruction. There is a strong commitment to developing consistency in the curriculum across the school and establishing a logical sequence of progress from grade to grade. A team of teachers and administrators have developed detailed pacing calendars in reading, writing, mathematics and social studies for each grade level. Each year, teachers revise the calendars and develop new goals, and write up new units of study that are shared across the grade. Based on a professional development survey, this year faculty members are developing more powerful strategies to further differentiate classroom instruction and to effectively integrate technology.

The principal, with a long tenure in the school, has a firm grasp on budgeting, scheduling, and staffing decisions. The principal utilized part of recent additional funds to hire more teachers to work with special education students and others at risk of not meeting grade standards to assure that individual needs are met. Careful attention is given to the placement of students for the next year.

Teachers have high expectations for students and plan instruction that actively engages learners in their classrooms. Students recognize these high expectations, yet feel supported when there are challenges in meeting them. Students are well aware of how to ask for help for personal or academic matters. A respect initiative highlights community standards and behavioral expectations. Students hold the faculty in high regard and seek out their teachers outside of instructional time for extra help with their work. Attendance expectations are understood and follow-up takes place when needed.

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 views staff selection as one of her most important tasks. This process is both thoughtful and collaborative. Teacher candidates who are intellectually curious, quick learners and who enjoy working with children are strong contenders for openings as they occur. As new teachers are inducted and meet with their grade level colleagues, an emphasis is placed on the importance of using data to improve student achievement.

Professional development is a major strength of the school and there is an established culture that supports ongoing faculty learning. As data reveal gaps, teachers are funded to attend training sessions that respond to these needs. Teachers participate in after school professional development sessions and grade level meetings held twice a month and which give good opportunities to reflect on and evaluate instructional practices. These sessions have developed the capacity of teachers to meet the needs of individual students and to share strategies across the grade level.

The principal and assistant principals are frequently in the classrooms and provide both formal and informal feedback designed to improve teaching and learning. To assure consistency across grade levels, each of the three assistant principals works very effectively with designated grade levels and across academic subject areas to coordinate pacing calendars and curriculum maps.

The principal has implemented many initiatives during her eight years as the school leader. She places a strong emphasis on continuous improvement and has systematic ways of ensuring the school continues to develop. Comprehensive communication and clear roles and responsibilities ensure the school runs smoothly.

Wide-ranging cultural, community, and parental partnerships are a strength of the school. Recent initiatives focus on the environment and making healthy nutritional choices. The school's long established relationship with Columbia University's Teachers College reading and writing project has assisted with the development and effective use of literacy assessments. Student support service staff and pupil personnel committee members provide designated services, although the school administration recognizes the importance of more effective and timely collaboration between these groups.

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.

As part of their annual review of student achievement data, the school administrators and lead teachers effectively develop improvement plans based on student performance results. For example, a few years ago, results in mathematics were below expectations. A comprehensive plan was developed and implemented which included hiring a mathematics intervention teacher, additional lesson demonstrations in classrooms, a closer review of interim assessment data and more time given to mathematics instruction in class schedules.

Throughout the year as teachers meet by grade level, careful notes are kept about the revisions needed to curriculum maps or pacing calendars. While goals are reviewed periodically, a comprehensive review takes place annually through teacher and parent surveys, data reports, and through school leadership and administrative team meetings. The administrative team recognizes the need to more closely scrutinize the performance of all sub-groups. As an Empowerment School, the school will now receive and analyze comparative achievement data from similar schools to help benchmark and compare its performance more accurately.

This is a school where reflection on practice is part of the school culture. The development of each child is a priority. As economic and ethnic characteristics of the neighborhood change, they recognize the need to sustain the rich multi-cultural focus that is a hallmark of the school.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: William Penn School (PS 321)	∅	✓	+
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	