



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Abe Stark Primary School

Public School 346

**1400 Pennsylvania Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11239**

Principal: Kevin Caifa

Dates of review: May 30 – June 1, 2007

Reviewer: Alvin Jeffs

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Abe Stark Primary School is located at Starrett City in the East Brooklyn area. It serves 823 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 6. Of these students 70% are Black 20% Hispanic, 7% White and the remaining 4% are largely Asian. In September 2007 it will become a preparatory school serving pre-kindergarten to grade 5. The school has developed a specialism within the teaching of the gifted and challenge classes for gifted students from a wider catchment area at all levels of the school.

Of the 823 students 3% are English language learners and 8% are special education students with individual education plans. Almost three-quarters (72.7%) of the students have Title 1 eligibility, which is high compared with the average New York primary school. Attendance, at 91.3%, is good for District 19 and only just below the average for all New York schools.

The principal has only led the school since September 2007.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students say they feel safe and enjoy learning
- Parents recognize the positive changes that have taken place over the past year.
- Staff demonstrate a high level of commitment to all students.
- Students show maturity within lessons and in their interaction with visitors.
- The new principal has ably supported staff in the development of new classroom procedures.
- Most teachers make good use of a wide range of data within their planning.
- Staff work in a collaborative way that makes the most of everyone's skills and experience.
- Thoughtful budgeting has allowed the school to teach smaller classes and staff to have extra opportunities to plan.
- Teachers show good attention to individual academic needs in their lesson planning and implementation.
- The cabinet is using data well to monitor the progress of the most vulnerable students.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all staff are confident in techniques that challenge higher achieving students in general education classes.
- Use the school's good database to monitor the progress of all sub-groups within the school.
- Support some staff in the use of data to differentiate within their planning.
- Consider the possibility of a greater student participation in decision-making within the school.
- Ensure that professional development programs include a significant amount of modeling to support teachers implement new ways of working.
- Develop a detailed and costed plan for school development in 2007–08.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Although the principal is new to the school, he has had a dramatic impact on it and the standards it is attaining in a short space of time. The most recent English language arts figures indicate that students attaining levels 3 and 4 at 5th grade are 58%, 67% at fourth grade and 58% at third grade. This represents a significant improvement over the previous year and shows the school's progress in this area to be on an upward course, with annual improvement much better than the New York City and local averages for District 19.

Despite a change of leadership and also of management style, there has been little or no staff changeover and this highlights the sensitivity with which some significant changes have been managed. The principal has a clear vision which is rooted in high achievement for all students. This in turn is translated into high student expectations from staff. Staff attendance has improved significantly and most staff see the benefit they have derived from the principal's support and advice in developing lesson planning and individual student programs on the basis of valid and up-to-date information. They are also keen to begin to implement a core knowledge curriculum which is already in preparation for introduction next year.

Impressively, the principal's short time in post has meant that he has assisted the school in becoming proficient in all areas of its work. The school's evaluation of itself is honest and accurate. It sees the need to ensure that all staff now use data to further refine lesson and program planning, although most staff are already happy with in this way of working. It also recognizes that to have achieved so much in such a short space of time means that the development of a clear and costed plan for the school's improvement, with responsibilities, deadlines and resource implications is something that now needs to be dealt with for the academic year 2007-2008.

Above all this is a happy school where staff and students work in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

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.

This year has seen a rigorous overhaul of data collection and analysis within the school. In September 2006, all under-achieving students were identified as a priority along with 'cusp' students, those who might just miss attaining appropriate levels. This provided a basis for addressing the disappointing examination results from 2005–06. As each new set of external English assessment results came in for grades three through six they were analyzed and all students below grade level were scheduled to receive regular pull-out

sessions. Levels in mathematics and social sciences were then analyzed and a similar approach taken. For the youngest students the relevant data was similarly studied and acted upon. Portfolios of student work were established for all and the cabinet ensured that each new piece of data was studied and the implications fed back directly to the grade meetings for action. The school now has a good data collection and analysis process which provides a clear picture of every student. This database means that a closer study can be made of achievement by gender, the pattern of progress by English language learners and for students who have special education programs. The school realizes that it will need to look at data relating to ethnic sub-groups now it has established a sound database and has raised the overall level of achievement. From its analysis of data, the school is also aware that progress being made by gifted students is not be high enough.

The school has good contacts with other schools, but does not yet have a rigorous way of comparing itself with similar schools. It has, however, radically re-designed its approach to phonics teaching as the result of investigations elsewhere. Comparison with previous internal levels is good, but the principal sees this year as the new baseline with which to make challenging comparisons.

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.

Goal-setting based on student performance has improved dramatically this year and had a significant impact on teaching through good collaborative work. It is not yet at the point where all staff are convinced of the value of new, data-driven, ways of working. Parents report that, although most teachers have the highest expectations for students, it is not yet universal. There are indications in achievement data that some higher-attaining students within general education classes are not yet be challenged adequately. There are some very good classroom practices and the school would benefit from sharing these.

The school now has very good systems for teachers to work together. Grade groups are the strongest collaborations within the school and all use data well to identify student and grade needs. The link between grade meetings and cabinet members is strong. As a result, new data information or proposals for new scheduling, such as the introduction of first period academic intervention classes, are disseminated quickly.

At class, grade and school levels there is prompt and practical attention to students whose progress is a cause for concern. When this occurs all staff, including all members of the school-based support team, show very detailed knowledge of students, academically, personally and in terms of any social pressures they be experiencing. The identification of ‘cusp’ students at the start of the year is akin to the quick response to any struggling students and reflects the emphasis on high achievement for all.

This high expectation is conveyed well by most teachers in regular classroom conferencing. Most students know in general terms what they need to work on. Within the teaching team there is a mixture of expertise and practice in communicating targets to students. Parents attest that they always receive good detail at the meetings with teachers. This includes student work and the relevant progress data together with staff opinions and observations.

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.

This year has been very much one of setting a sound basis for the core curriculum. Creative scheduling has enabled academic intervention lessons to provide a strong, and higher standards, within English language arts and mathematics. This core is now appropriate for the wide range of students within the school and lends itself well to continued development. Plans are already in place to introduce a new science curriculum, which in turn will be possible by the introduction of a six-day week. These initiatives, together with the good data-collection processes, provide a structure that will ensure that all data collected will inform curriculum and teaching developments.

Overall, teaching within the school is of a high standard. Most, but not all, teachers differentiate work well on the basis of available data. Students show interest and there is a mutual respect between staff and students. Thus, in an excellent grade 3 lesson the teacher has students grouped into ‘literacy circles’, where each student has a role. The involvement of the students and the lucidity with which they discuss the texts is impressive and at a very high level for students of this age. In other contexts students say they would like to be more involved in decision-making within the school.

All initiatives have been well backed up by use of the budget. Thus, staff will, for the first time, be able to come into the school in August to plan curriculum units. Appropriate money has been spent on materials to back up the new phonics program and staff are currently looking to purchase books that will challenge higher- and under-achieving students. The appointment of new staff has been successful and the budget has been used well to ensure that there are enough coaches to support the full range of staff.

Students say that their teachers provide them with good support and advice. They see the school as a safe place in which to learn and play. This, together with prompt procedures for checking, means that attendance remains stable at 91.3%.

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.

The new principal has a high level of respect from all who work with him. Not only has he laid the basis of a coherent and responsive curriculum, he has gained the respect of students to whom he relates well. Since September 2006 he has ensured that all procedures are effective and contribute well to a safe and respectful learning environment. There is now a sound teamwork basis to all activities and planning and evaluation are characterized by the effective collection and analysis of data, together with prompt and practical curricular responses where needed. Thus, reading results have triggered a new approach to phonics and English achievement has led to the setting up a wide range of additional support lessons.

The principal and senior staff provide good lesson observations for staff with detailed practical feedback on a regular basis. This has triggered a noticeable increase in inter-visitation between teachers, which, in turn, has allowed good practice to be shared and

inexperience supported. There is the highest expectation of all teachers and this is reflected by the fact that those recently appointed are very comfortable with the detailed use of data in planning. The relevant professional development provided for them and their longer tenured colleagues. Good training has been set up to enhance English language arts and mathematics teaching and senior staff have the time to turnkey training they have received on the core knowledge curriculum. Many staff say that they would appreciate more modeling of techniques within their classrooms. This, they say, will assist them in moving from theory to practice.

There is an excellent link with many community organizations and the partnership between the school and 'Starrett City Inc.' has been highly effective in developing trips and out-of-school activities for most students. Also as a result music and scouting activities have thrived and there are good links to therapists and counselors outside the school.

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.

The school recognizes that its planning this year has been effective, but, in many cases, informal. It also accepts the need to devise more formal procedures than the school has previously had for developing a coherent education plan. It has developed an effective school leadership team and boosted the cabinet with coaches. Other teams, such as the pupil personnel team committee and the school-based support team, show all of the positive characteristics that have been well modeled by senior staff. There is now a strong culture of using data to prove a case, using objective information to assess situations and devising practical outcomes following on from the discussion of both.

The many initiatives undertaken during the current academic year have been the result of effective analysis of performance scores, reviewed in the light of how successful they have been in enhancing progress. The comparison of students within grades, between grades and with previous years has been rigorous and contributed to the relevant responses which, in turn, have seen increased results in formal examinations.

There have been numerous occasions when initiatives have been reviewed against their contribution to student performance. When the result has been negative, such as English results in the Fall, new procedures have been put in place. Where successful, the practice, such as the development of inclusive classrooms, has been extended.

The business-like way in which data has been used to plan and evaluate is impressive and bodes well for the school's future. The school sees the next stage as being one where there is a much wider involvement in strategic planning and where plans have clear targets and deadlines, together with responsibilities and resource implications. Informally, this has worked very well this year and contributed to the excellent progress made.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Abe Stark School (PS 346)	∅	✓	+
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	