



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Mary McLeod Bethune Academy

Public/Middle School 394

188 Rochester Avenue

Brooklyn

NY 11213

Principal: Ms. Claudette Murray

Dates of review: October 11 – 13, 2006

Reviewer: Anne Munt-Davies

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Mary McLeod Middle School is a pre-kindergarten through grade 8 school serving 822 students. The school reopened in 1998, having been closed for two years while the building was restored and renovated. The elementary school opened with one grade and the middle school opened with grade 6. In 2006 the middle and elementary schools “bridged”, forming one complete pre-kindergarten to 8th grade school.

Most students in the ten grades come from the surrounding neighborhood of Crown Heights, Brooklyn. The majority, 93%, is Black, 4.3% are Hispanic and the remainder from other groups. Almost all students are proficient in English on arrival; only 5 students receive support as English language learners or have limited English proficiency. Approximately 90% of students are eligible for Title 1 funding. The school has a stable population with most students passing through from one of the four pre-kindergarten classes into the elementary school.

There are 66 special education students, 11 of whom are in general education classes with the remainder in one of the five self-contained classes. One class is an inclusion class and this is co-taught by two teachers. These figures show a significant increase over the figures for 2005-06, when the school had 40 special education students.

The attendance rate is 92.6%, slightly above average for New York City and close to that of similar schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal demonstrates outstanding leadership, and she has successfully led the school through a time of change.
- The elementary school and pre-kindergarten programs provide an excellent start to the students' education, providing a solid foundation for social and educational development.
- The care and support given for the well-being of all students is very good.
- There is some excellent practice in the use of data, especially in the elementary school and early childhood center.
- Students who are at risk academically receive high quality support.
- The emphasis on core subjects, especially reading, provides a sound basis for academic success.
- Collaborative planning and inter-disciplinary work are effective; they have an impact on student success and teacher support.
- There are effective systems for reaching out to parents, involving them and helping them share in their child's education.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop and consolidate opportunities for students in the middle grades to take increased levels of responsibility for their own learning.
- Ensure that the quality of the curriculum and instruction is consolidated, deepened and adapted to suit the needs of all learners as they progress through the upper grades of the middle school.
- Extend opportunities for the higher achieving students, especially in the middle grades.
- Develop the use of data in the middle grades so that assessment is used more consistently throughout the school to set challenging goals and assess what needs to be taught as well as assessing what has been taught and mastered.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school overall, with excellent features.

The Mary McLeod Bethune School provides its students with many high-quality learning experiences. Students and their parents are shown respect, care and support, through which they become valued members of the school community. The use of data is already well-developed in the elementary school and developing well throughout the school. This very solid base enables students to develop useful learning skills and habits and sets the tone for high expectations, which permeate through much of the school.

The leadership of the principal is outstanding. She knows her school well and her leadership has guided the school successfully through a time of significant change and growth.

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

In pre-kindergarten and on entry to the school, students are assessed in order to provide a benchmark for their starting points. This data is carefully monitored and used to understand student gains and to monitor progress. Throughout the elementary school there is a well developed system of assessment which utilizes testing outcomes and teacher assessment to inform teacher planning and instructional practice. Monitoring of outcomes is not as sophisticated and fully embedded in the middle school grades but is still, nevertheless, having an impact. The principal and assistant principals monitor the outcomes from assessments and use the information to evaluate the quality of instructional practice as well as the progress made by grades and particular groups of students. The assistant principal, who has responsibility for the elementary school, has excellent systems in place for the elementary and early childhood classes. Here there is highly developed practice which uses data in a detailed way to ensure that the needs of all students are met. Progress is carefully measured and used to track the individual developmental stages and next steps for each child.

Results from State and City tests are analyzed by the coaches as well as by the principal and assistant principal and where data indicates that a student is in need of additional support an appropriate strategy is designed and implemented. Data is used effectively to review progress, especially in the elementary school grades. It is also well used to ensure that students receive appropriate support. At-risk students therefore receive help from an integrated team depending on their particular needs. However, there is less focus on the higher-achieving students; data is not used as rigorously with this group to ensure their progress is closely monitored and make sure these students are challenged sufficiently.

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 overall with some well developed features.

Quality communication, shared common purpose and the high expectations demonstrated by the principal and the team of assistant principals have created a solid base for effective collaboration within the school. The various school teams, including class teachers, the academic intervention and extended instructional support teams, the coaches for mathematics and guidance counselors work effectively to create a web of practical intervention strategy and support.

Teams use data well, creating an effective support for academic interventions. The link between their work and teaching can be traced through to its impact on students targeted for academic support. These students receive high quality, thoughtful interventions, which include well-focused goal setting. However, higher-achieving students are not yet receiving such well-focused attention throughout the school, an issue that the administration has identified as an area for development.

In the kindergarten and throughout the elementary school, day-to-day teacher assessments are used to set next steps in learning. Learning goals are clearly linked to instruction in very specific and individualized ways. However, although consistent expectations are in place throughout the school, there are some gaps between the expectation and the practice, particularly in the transition to the middle school and through the middle school grades.

Special education students have learning goals and these are closely monitored for outcomes. However, while the comprehensive data the school collects is used effectively in monitoring student progress it is used less effectively in setting challenging goals for all students. Assessment *for* learning, as well as assessment *of* learning, is therefore an area for further development. For example, the school identifies and supports students in the middle grades who are ready to take Regents tests. However, this is identified by observing student readiness rather than by monitoring and goal setting for this group of students. There is also more to do to ensure that there are systems in place which enable students in the middle grades to take more responsibility for their own learning by setting themselves goals which challenge and extend their learning, thus raising the bar on their achievement. At present they are not always sufficiently equipped with the tools to solve problems independently.

The administration recognizes the need to extend learning opportunities through differentiated activities and instruction, especially for the older students as they prepare for high school. The Comprehensive Education Plan documents the ways and means of achieving this and the school's self-evaluation accurately assesses where the school is on the path to these areas for development.

Parents have opportunities for excellent support both from the parent coordinator and from the teaching and support staff. Parent workshops are regularly held in the school and there is involvement through the Parent Corps. The support for parents to become involved in their child's learning is an outstanding feature of the school, helping to give very young children and their parents an excellent start.

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 with some well developed features.

Student attendance is good and is closely monitored within the school, using formal and informal measures. One of the most powerful tools in maintaining high attendance is the close relationship that exists between the staff, the parents and students. There is a strong culture of care and commitment which permeates the school and this results in students and parents who feel confident and secure. The teachers know the students well and they demonstrate a commitment to giving them the personal support necessary to succeed. This happens in all sorts of positive ways, including the effective role modeling staff demonstrate and the fact that even though this has now grown to be a large school the principal and assistant principals know the students personally.

Students show enjoyment in their work and engagement in their learning, especially when instruction is challenging, well-paced and differentiated appropriately. In a pre-kindergarten class, a student diligently explained the daily expectations of his class and the reasons why these expectations helped him to learn. His confidence and understanding was an outstanding example of what can be achieved by even the youngest students in the school. In the elementary school both qualitative and quantitative measures of learning are used to inform what is to be taught as well as how it could be taught. However, this practice is not yet as well developed in the middle grades. Qualitative data is not yet fully utilized for planning the curriculum and ensuring that the curriculum is fully aligned to the needs of all students.

Students speak with pride of their achievements and of the ways in which the school has helped them. Many speak cogently and feel confident in suggesting ways to make the school an even better place. High standards of behavior are expected and demanded especially in the elementary years. There is still more to do to develop these high standards throughout the school, but given that this school is so newly formed, the progress towards a consistent standard is remarkable.

Although students are confident and behave well, there are few opportunities for students to have a voice in the school in order to be able to make a contribution to their own and the school’s development. Structured and formative ways to develop and empower students by equipping them to better utilize their skills of communication and responsibility to become independent learners have yet to be fully implemented. Instructional leaders recognize that these are essential skills for success in high school and college and have outlined plans for to give students a greater voice in the school.

The curriculum has many good features, one of which is the importance placed on reading. Reading is promoted by all staff but the principal and the librarian in particular show a demonstrable passion for reading for pleasure as well as research. Students are given many opportunities to read, the library is an attractive and well-stocked resource and students are encouraged to use it for research and for private study. Each classroom has a library of books leveled so that students can achieve enjoyment and also make good progress in their reading skills. The school’s involvement in the One Hundred Books Challenge (a commercial program designed to encourage independent reading) seems to be having an impact. Students were seen reading independently. Again, the principal and staff recognize that there is more to do to ensure that the gains made in core subjects in the elementary school are consolidated and built upon throughout the school and that higher-order skills in literacy are developed. The Balanced Literacy program has been

adopted and work is underway to ensure it is implemented with consistency. There is an awareness that “literacy is everyone’s business.” Teachers new to the system are given numerous opportunities for support and development, including the ongoing support provided by the coach.

There are excellent facilities for physical education; this is recognized as an important part of student learning. Art is also a valued part of student experience in the school. The school environment is well-maintained and student work is displayed with pride and value. Technology is used effectively to support learning across the curriculum. The surrounding neighborhood is recognized as an important curriculum resource. A sense of self-worth and pride is actively promoted in many ways through the curriculum. An example of students using their own knowledge to become more independent learners is found in the use of technology, for example, where the teacher demonstrated the students’ work in using PowerPoint presentations. They rose to this challenge and quickly demonstrated mastery with skill, confidence and high-quality work; this also illustrated a readiness on the part of students to take responsibility for their learning.

While there are many strengths, the curriculum is not yet fully aligned to the needs of all students and in particular the needs of the higher-achieving students in the middle school. Just as data is not used sufficiently in setting goals for students, it is not yet used sufficiently in instruction to ensure alignment for the full range of student need. Providing a curriculum framework which has sufficient breadth and depth to meet the needs of all students is recognized as an area for development now that the school encompasses pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The administration has already taken steps to set in place structures to support curriculum articulation from one grade to the next. Ensuring that the curriculum provides appropriate challenge through differentiation both in instruction and in the way the curriculum is developed throughout the school will be an ongoing task.

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 quality of leadership is a strength of the school. The founding members have been instrumental in supporting the newer members of the management team and are a powerful, creative and effective guiding force. The principal has watched over the growth of the school with an obvious dedication to the students, staff and parents. She is very well respected within the school community for her positive personal qualities and professional attributes. The management team and teaching staff speak highly of the support and guidance she provides and the very high standards she upholds and demands. The assistant principal responsible for the elementary school has been a significant figure in the school’s success and the quality of her work is rightly recognised by parents, colleagues and students.

Professional development is of very high quality and its impact can be tracked to the goals and priorities set in the school’s Comprehensive Education Plan as well as to student support and achievement. Teachers work collaboratively and the school leadership team gives careful consideration to supporting and coaching teachers in their work. There are high levels of accountability demanded within the school. The recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced staff is not always easy but successful solutions have been sought and implemented. Teachers who are new to the school or newly qualified are

given very good support; this works well informally and also through the professional development program.

There is still more work to do on the development of instructional leadership; this not surprising as this is a newly formed and large school. That the systems and expectations are in place and are consistent speaks of the school's capacity to develop. The thoughtful and detailed self-evaluation presented for the review and the Comprehensive Education Plan are examples of a style of leadership which is collaborative, supportive and yet demanding of the staff who join this community.

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 well-developed features.

This is still a work in progress and, given the transitions experienced in the school recently, it is not unexpected that the impact of policies and procedures is not yet consistent throughout the school. The administration is fully aware of the need to develop ways of monitoring, revising and implementing change at whole school level.

The very detailed Comprehensive Education Plan clearly sets out the plans for improvement and ways in which challenges are being met as the school develops. The on-going strategy is very clearly articulated. The principal, academic support team, coaches, and assistant principals together make a team of reflective practitioners who are aware of the need to develop practice which is consistently applied throughout the school. Now that the school is fully formed, the systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of practice can be developed to ensure consistent use of data and information at whole-school level.

While there is good practice for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, the use of assessment in forming goals for students and focusing on ways in which assessment data is used to inform learning as well as teaching is an area for refinement. Instruction is not yet fully aligned to meeting the full range of needs and while there is good practice in the school and systems for teachers to learn from each other, there is more to do to ensure that this is providing the best possible support for all students, especially those who are higher achieving.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Mary McLeod Bethune Academy (PS/MS 394)	∅	✓	+
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	