



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Foster-Laurie School

Public School 397

**490 Fenimore Street
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Nancy Colon

Dates of review: September 28 - 29, 2006

Reviewer: Clive Parsons

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

PS 397, Foster-Laurie School, is a relatively small school for grades kindergarten through 5. It averages three classes per grade, with just over 400 students in total. The kindergarten has recently been brought into the main school building. This has restricted space a little, but provides for a better continuity and sharing of expertise. The teacher profile broadly mirrors that of similar schools and the city as a whole, although overall, they are slightly more experienced than elsewhere.

Most students are Black and the school has more students recently arrived in the country than other schools, with students coming mainly from the Caribbean. There is a relatively small number of special education students, although initial referrals have grown significantly over recent years, so that they are now close to that of other schools. The school has a relatively low proportion of English language learners, being less than half the average of other City schools. The school is placed in the medium-need similar schools group. Student attendance is average compared with similar and City-wide schools. The stability of the student population dropped below average in 2005 and more students are eligible for Title 1 funding than similar schools and the City as a whole.

The open plan nature of the building presents staff with both challenges and opportunities. While noisier activities can be distracting, teachers can more easily share ideas and strategies. The principal is in her third year at the school.

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Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has high expectations and a clear vision for the continued improvement of the school.
- The principal is passionate about maximizing students' personal as well as academic progress.
- Good collaborative planning, with valuable contributions from specialist staff, supports congruent instruction and the professional development of staff.
- There are examples of very effective instruction, where data is used to group pupils for differentiated support and challenge, and where students' progress is constantly monitored and evaluated.
- The school is increasingly adept at modifying the curriculum and its schedule to help maximize students' performance.
- The principal's strong advocacy for the child is leading to an increased focus on individualizing learning and student progress.
- Intervention and additional support are determined and targeted through the effective analysis of data.
- Community confidence in the school is growing and activities for parents, such as workshops, are increasing their understanding of the school's work, vision and expectations.

What the school needs to improve

- Analyze the performance of all groups of students to monitor differences in achievement and ensure that all students benefit equally from good instruction.
- Develop a more consistent learning experience and rates of progress for all students by ensuring that all teachers are rigorous in their use of data to determine their approach and engage students in meaningful learning activities.
- Help teachers to become more consistent in the use of data to individualize learning, to provide more differentiated instruction and to demonstrate increased student progress.
- Target professional development more individually to maximise its impact on classroom practice and student achievement.
- Raise the capacity of staff to monitor and evaluate plans and goals and to modify next steps in learning as a result.
- Build carefully and systematically upon the work with parents to increase their involvement in their child's learning and the life of the school, within an agreed structure.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The principal knows the school well and has high expectations and a clear vision for its sustained improvement. There is secure capacity to achieve this, although it will require much determination and rigor. There is much evidence to show that the principal's vision is becoming visible in practice. Nonetheless, there remains much to do if the vision and her expectations are to be fully met.

The school's accountability status is 'in good standing', with adequate yearly progress having been made in English language arts, mathematics and science in 2006. Despite below average performance in State test results for grade 4 in all three subjects than in similar schools and across the City as a whole, outcomes for students are improving.

Collaborative planning is helping to bring consistency to instruction. A greater focus on learning and student progress is helping to target and differentiate instruction more effectively. Data is being used with increasing effect to direct the work of the school, as well as to evaluate its success.

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.

The school collects a good range of data to help understand and monitor student performance. Standard tests across a grade are used, such as mathematics unit tests, as well as rubrics such as guided reading charts. These strategies help to ensure that evaluations are accurate and consistent between teachers. Teachers are also increasingly sensitive to the need to monitor and evaluate learning as each class progresses in order to enable them to differentiate instruction and to support and challenge at the right level. The school has identified that practice in this area remains too inconsistent, however, with some teachers requiring significant support to adapt their practice. Running records and student folders provide evidence of individual students' progress. Professional development opportunities are also provided for staff to share and critique students' work, helping to make evaluations more reliable.

The principal has an accurate view of the progress being made by individual students and classes and is aware of the need to evaluate this further with regard to other groups. She has identified the need to be more systematic in the utilization of common assessments at periods throughout the year for comparative purposes. She has also identified the need for staff to more consistently explain student performance by reference to state standards and expectations. Standardized tests are interrogated to identify individual student and whole school strengths and weaknesses. The school appropriately judges its success with reference to similar schools and its improvement in terms of its own previous 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 proficient.

The principal has high expectations for the effectiveness of instruction and the progress that each student should make. While staff share these expectations, some do not yet have the capacity to ensure this happens in practice. Learning in a small number of classrooms lacks pace and challenge for too many students. Where learning is at its most effective, teachers accurately judge what students know and understand and then determine what they need to do to take their achievement to the next level. Data from standardized tests is reviewed to identify students’ strengths and areas in need of development. However, this is not consistently applied to groups and grades in order to identify more generic weaknesses.

Data, together with a wider knowledge of each student, is appropriately used to identify those in greatest need of improvement for intervention and enrichment programs. These programs are well managed and evaluated to check students’ progress and to monitor their effectiveness. Regular meetings to review progress help to ensure that intervention programs have a positive impact on students’ achievement.

A review of data is also used to formulate the Comprehensive Educational Plan. The school has identified the need to extend the range of staff contributing to this process in order to increase the sense of shared ownership, build staff capacity and increase accountability.

Quality Statement 3 – Build and Align Capacity: 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.

The school increasingly uses data and other evidence, including that obtained from direct observations of classes, to align its instruction to meet the needs of students more effectively. For example, having identified issues of below expected progress in mathematics, some sessions have been switched to the morning when students are considered more receptive and have greater levels of concentration. Collaborative planning and evaluation sessions are also helping to ensure that meaningful interim data is collected and analyzed.

Teachers routinely assess students’ skills and understanding. Most teachers are making a secure transition from focusing on instruction to focusing on learning so that their instruction is guided by students’ response. This enables them to group students and to differentiate their support and challenge appropriately. Some teachers, however, need significant professional development in order to do this successfully.

The principal is careful to support innovation and development with resources so that budget and staff decisions are appropriately focused on the needs of students. Teachers feel accountable for the progress of their students. Classroom teaching is frequently observed, with feedback and goals established. This, together with other professional development opportunities, is helping to improve practice. In most classes lessons are interactive and engage students well. Students respond to established routines, behave well and enjoy their learning. A few classes lack rigor. They progress at too slow a pace and remain too focused upon the teacher rather than involving students in learning activities. Students in these classes do not consistently engage well and lose interest and motivation.

High student attendance is a high priority for the school and individual students' 100% attendance is highlighted and awarded. Teachers are sensitive to attendance patterns and aspects of a student's personal development that may begin to disrupt their learning. Concerns trigger exploration and intervention where appropriate, including contact with families. Staff can be tenacious in ensuring that solutions are found and issues resolved. Students agree that they have an adult within the school to whom they can turn for support should the need arise.

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.

Collaborative planning sessions are supported well by coaches and have a positive impact on the quality of teachers' planning and students' learning. Together with reviews of the effectiveness of implementation they provide frequent and effective ways of developing and improving the quality of instruction. Direct observations of teachers and classes at work, coupled with data analysis, provide objective evaluations of success and goals for further development. Feedback is an integral part of these activities. Areas for professional development are also identified through one-on-one meetings and through questionnaires. The school has identified the need now to provide more individualized professional development to improve its impact for some staff.

The principal is careful to ensure that newly appointed staff share her vision and strengthen its capacity to improve further. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis, with clear procedures that are generally followed well. Parents' meetings, including workshops, encourage them to become actively engaged in their child's learning and are increasing parental understanding of the school's work, vision and expectations. Opportunities are available for parents to meet with teachers and there are some parent helpers in school. The school has recognized the need to build carefully and systematically upon this work within an agreed structure to strengthen parental involvement further. Similarly, partnerships within the local community are used effectively to support learning.

The principal has gained the trust and respect of the community with her clear concern for the academic and personal development of every learner. She understands the school well, including where its strengths lie and the areas that it needs to develop. She has made significant improvements in the quality of instruction and has the determination to maintain this. She has built the capacity of staff so that the ability to sustain improvement is secure. There is scope to build on these successes to tackle the remaining weaknesses with energy and rigor to shift the school to the next level of effectiveness.

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.

A range of strategies is used to gather evidence of the progress and implementation of plans. These include regular meetings with parents, the academic intervention team, grade conferences and discussion with staff. Regular assessments and test outcomes between grades and classes are compared, as are outcomes with other schools. These formal mechanisms are also supported by much informal dialogue within the school.

Instructional decisions are based on data and aligned appropriately with the Comprehensive Educational Plan. While strategies and plans are generally modified and adapted in response to the evidence gathered, the school has identified the need to support some teachers in making changes and adapting provision in order to meet the needs of all students as the year progresses.

The principal knows the school well and the areas for improvement identified through self-review are mirrored in this report.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Foster-Laurie School (PS 397)	∅	✓	+
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	