



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

New School @ 314

(The School of Discovery and Exploration)

Public School 503

**330 59th Street
Brooklyn
NY 11220**

Principal: David Weiner

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Reviewer: Cheryl Baker

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

P.S. 503 serves 747 students in pre-kindergarten through grade 5. Five percent of students have special education needs. Thirty three percent are English language learners among whom the predominant home language is Spanish. Eighty-five percent are Hispanic, 10% are Asian and 5% represent other backgrounds. The school is Title I eligible with the proportion of students exceeding the City average. Attendance averages 96%, which is above that of the City.

The school opened in September of 2006 as one of two reconstituted elementary schools that emerged from the restructuring of a large elementary school that had formerly occupied the site. As an Empowerment School, P.S.503 has more flexibility to make key decisions and control the 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.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal successfully orchestrated the creation of the school and has provided vision and leadership for improved teaching and learning.
- The principal models shared decision-making and practices distributed leadership.
- Administration and staff are devoted to the school, its mission and the improvement of the educational experience of each student.
- Staff are energized by their increased role in the leadership and governance of the school.
- Students in greatest need are supported by a broad array of academic supports.
- Students benefit from curricular and extra-curricular programs that provide access to the arts, athletics and academic enrichment.
- Parents are welcomed in the school and feel well supported by administration, teachers and the school's community-based organizations.
- The school is well organized and its high expectations are clearly communicated to staff and parents.
- Teachers are well supported in their professional development through a variety of individualized opportunities.
- Student academic and artistic work is celebrated throughout the building.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop and align curriculum in the core tested areas across the kindergarten through grade 5 spectrum.
- Provide training in the use of statistical and anecdotal data for the differentiation of instruction.
- Continue to support teachers in the implementation of balanced literacy.
- Continue to institute programs to foster improvements in student behavior.
- Revise programs for the effective support of English language learners based on anticipated increased funding.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The school is led by a highly skilled and visionary principal who has succeeded in transforming a large elementary school into two smaller schools. Through this evolutionary process, the school has created structures for gathering achievement and other data, planning for improvement and broadening the leadership base among teachers and staff. The school is committed to continued improvement in curriculum and instruction for the benefit of all members of its diverse student body, who are well cared for by the administration and staff.

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 has instituted rigorous systems for gathering data regarding student progress in, especially, English language arts, through practices such as running records and conference notes. Progress in achieving grade level reading benchmarks is closely monitored and is a significant measure of student, classroom and grade level achievement. Additionally, student progress in mathematics is monitored through the administration of unit tests. Periodic assessments, such as the Princeton Review and the Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System have been used to assess students' incremental progress but the accuracy of results from these assessments has limited their usefulness in diagnosing students' discrete learning needs in a timely fashion. The school supplemented its data sources by utilizing the Dynamic Indicators of Early Basic Literacy Skills and the Writing and Reading Assessment Profile for students and grade levels.

The school monitors the progress of ethnic groups, English language learners and students with special needs. Mandated assessments are administered and analyzed to inform placement, services or to measure progress with respect to student's individual education plans. The school identified Hispanic English language learners as a particular focus area, leading to research and program adoptions. Another category of interest is students, primarily males at grades 4 and 5, whose behavior disrupts learning. The school is vigilant in tracking and analyzing incident data and using this to inform current and future interventions. The school also monitors attendance for patterns relative to individuals and grade levels. As a new school, longitudinal comparisons of the progress of the school and individual students are somewhat limited. The administration has, however, identified State test data in English language arts for students who continued in the school during its restructuring and analyzed each child's growth from the previous school to P.S. 503. This analysis was also broken down according to date of entry and identified English language learners. While the school does not have other State test data, a school report card or progress report as yet, the administration did compare its progress in English to that of its neighboring school, its former school and other similar schools. Charts displaying students' progress in achieving reading benchmarks inform comparisons between

students, classrooms and grade levels. Comparison of progress in other academic areas is not as strong a focus at this time.

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.

As a new school, P.S. 503 does not have a Comprehensive Education Plan. The school’s creation, however, was guided by a representative group of administrators, teachers and parents who contributed to the New School Plan. This described all aspects of the school’s restructuring based on data from the previous school, as well as embodying the school’s new mission and vision. The school evaluated its progress mid-year and created an action plan, specifying short-term deadlines, to address necessary improvements. The principal’s performance review identifies three goals based on the analysis of student data and surveys. These were clearly manifested as the school developed through the academic year. Improvements among English language learners, adoption of Teachers College Readers and Writers Workshop, and the development of enrichment opportunities have been achieved through the activity of leaders, staff and, where appropriate, parents. Further, teachers engage in individual goal setting for their professional growth and their progress is evaluated bi-annually. Reading and mathematics benchmarks identify achievement targets that are measured every few months. Most curriculum plans identify monthly topics or units of study.

Plans for students with special needs inform their instruction and are monitored by teachers in collaborative team teaching settings. English language learners are similarly serviced in general education settings as are students needing academic interventions. The school has an impressive number of interventions and personnel who support those most in need of improvement who are instructed in specialized small groups, primarily on a pull-out basis during the school day. Students also receive extra help through extended-day, Saturday, before-school and after-school programs. Progress is monitored by practitioners, collated by academic intervention personnel and reviewed at pupil personnel meetings. Due to lack of funding, the school was not able to provide sufficient staff for its English language learners.

Parents and students are well informed as to the school’s high expectations and activities through numerous publications, meetings, conferences, workshops, social events and reporting mechanisms. The school’s new writing rubrics set clear expectations for high quality student writing and were communicated to parents. Parents feel very welcomed, valued and supported by the parent coordinator, the principal and the teachers. Attendance at events is strong. The principal is endeavoring to engender leadership among parents and is a regular participant at parent meetings.

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.

The school has focused on implementing the mandated curriculum in English language arts and mathematics this year. There has been a particular emphasis on embedding the assessments germane to balanced literacy through training with Teachers College. Curriculum in other subjects is informed by state standards and has been developed successfully by grade level teachers. In addition to the core content areas, students receive regular instruction in the visual and performing arts as well as physical education. The school has begun efforts to refine the alignment of curriculum from grade to grade, which it intends to continue as it moves forward. Teachers are held accountable for delivering the mandated curriculum through regular observations and evaluations of their teaching, collections of lesson plans and reviews of student work by administrators. Differentiation of instruction based on students' reading levels is commonplace as is differentiation by activity and grouping, especially in English language arts. Students are generally engaged in learning and those interviewed reported liking their school, their teachers and the principal. They know that they are well cared for during and after school and love the clubs and activities that have been created for them. Disturbances by some unruly students are on the decline and have not interfered with the overall enjoyment of school felt by the majority of students as is borne out by student attendance which averages 96%, above the average for the City. The school is quick to address absences and has clear structures and expectations with respect to student attendance.

The administration has based budget, staffing and scheduling decisions appropriately on student data and the components of the principal's performance review and the new school action plan. For example, behavioral incidents informed decisions to hire a crisis intervention teacher, a guidance counselor and purchase supplies to support their programs. Student and teacher schedules were adjusted to create lunch time counseling sessions for identified students. The principal lobbied for, and received, additional funding to begin to address the deficit of personnel to service English language learners. Additionally, classroom libraries were increased to support the balanced literacy initiative.

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 is highly respected by the whole school community for his openness, his vision, and his genuine belief in and respect for the capacity of all students to achieve. His successful transformation of a large struggling school into two new schools is noteworthy and teachers are proud to be part of the P.S.503 team. With his interview team the principal hired approximately 40% of the staff as the new P.S. 503 opened in 2006. Candidates were recruited nation-wide and the school undertook an extensive deliberative process including interviews and lesson demonstrations. In addition to candidates' capacity to use data, interest in collaboration and experience, the school sought to hire individuals with unique talents that they were willing to share with students. To support teachers at their point of need, professional development is differentiated and based on teachers' individual professional goals which are monitored by administrators in collaboration with teachers. Teachers have access to training through Teachers College which began this year to support the balanced literacy initiative. Attendees turn-key lessons with grade level peers. Wilson reading training, AUSSIE consultants, and Orton-Gillingham specialists are additional sources of professional support. Well structured visitations to other schools and among grade level classrooms support the institution of balanced literacy. Administrators and academic intervention specialists also provide

frequent coaching and feedback on teaching through classroom visitations. Retreats have supported curricular and school improvement initiatives.

The school is a model of distributive leadership and collaborative decision-making. Teachers are invited to share in the governance of the school through rotating grade level membership on or attendance at weekly cabinet meetings. Parents have a voice in the cabinet through the parent coordinator, who is a member. Grade leaders act as conduits of information between administration and staff and the principal, who communicates with staff through daily e-mails. All parties are actively involved in making decisions about curriculum, assessment and professional development. Staff members feel respected and are committed to carrying out their collective responsibility to share in the efforts to continue school improvement and student achievement. Regular communication and the establishment of school-wide policies and expectations have created a well-organized and efficient school where procedures are clear to teachers, students and parents.

The school is fortunate in that it houses two effective community based organizations, the Center for Family Life and the Lutheran Medical Center. Both organizations support families and students through early intervention and after-school programs that contribute significantly to the social wellbeing and academic growth of students. Several other agencies contribute to students' athletic and artistic growth in addition to the school's own extensive enrichment activities.

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's collaborative governance structures contribute to its capacity to evaluate the effectiveness of plans and interventions and make adjustments as necessary. For instance, the mid-year evaluation of the New School Plan led to several action items to be completed. For instance, in the short term, the creation of a parent resource guide, and in the long term, identifying the need for a behavior management program and increased coaching and lead teacher positions for the subsequent school year. Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms revealed a weakness in phonemic awareness which led to the introduction of the Word Work approach and the further exploration of the effectiveness of needs-based grouping to accelerate students' skill acquisition. The analysis of State tests in English and those administered to English language learners informed to focus of the Empowerment School Intensive. This action research project tested the effectiveness of the New Heights auditory intervention in increasing long-term English language learners' skills in sight word recognition and comprehension. The periodic assessments resulting from the Princeton Review, the Early Childhood Writing and Literacy Assessment System proved to be less effective as diagnostic tools than anticipated. To remedy this deficiency, the school developed its own expectations for the routine use of classroom assessments as sources of diagnostic information regarding student progress and placement in academic intervention programs, to good effect. The school's capacity to realign resources to address student outcomes is further illustrated by the institution of Wilson training for grade 5 teachers whose students were struggling with basic literacy skills.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: New School @ 314 P.S.503	∅	✓	+
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	