



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Connie Lekas School**

**Public School 811**

**2525 Haring Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11235**

**Principal: William Strein**

**Dates of review: March 5 – 7, 2007**

**Reviewer: Frank Jones**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Public School 811K is a center for students with multiple disabilities. It is a cluster school housed on five sites and serves students aged 11 through 21. Student disability classifications include multiply handicapped, autism, mentally retarded, and students who are emotionally disturbed. The main site consists of 35 classes and currently all are mandated to be administered by the New York State Alternate Assessments. There are, in addition, two junior high school and two high school sites

There are 414 students enrolled, of whom almost 12% are English language learners. Approximately 59% of the students are Black, 19% are Hispanic, 17% are White and 4% are Asian and other ethnic groups.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal has brought stability to the school and provides quiet but positive leadership.
- The staff display a high level of care and commitment as they endeavor to meet the complex needs of the students.
- Students are positive about each other and are pleased to be in the school.
- The school has developed and continues to develop good relationships with other schools where students are sited.
- There are an increasing number of students who are afforded the opportunity to be taught alongside their peers in general education.
- Parents are becoming more positive about the school and participating in the educational process.
- The number of opportunities for students to engage in work-study is rising and the support they receive at this time is good.
- The recent appointment of a complete leadership team that has the potential to take the school forward.

### What the school needs to improve

- Make more overt the standards the leadership expects of all staff.
- Ensure the direction of the school is communicated clearly to the staff and wider community.
- Improve the quality, reliability, analysis and use of assessment data.
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of all staff and target professional development accordingly.
- Provide and deliver a curriculum that meets the academic and functional needs of each student.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is an undeveloped school.**

The current principal has been in post for just over a year and prior to this the school had three temporary principals for a term each following the departure of the substantive post holder. This brought a considerable measure of uncertainty both to the direction of the school and for staff in terms of the differing expectations of them. The principal has begun to redress this situation even though he has led the school with only one assistant principal until the appointment of two others, the last as recently as March 1st 2007. The vast majority of the staff are supportive of the principal but there remains a small number whose actions raise issues that require investigation. This slows developments and impacts adversely on initiatives designed to provide a better education for the students.

Where the school has moved forward as in the provision for inclusion or developed an aspect of service such as work-study, students are benefiting from appropriate learning opportunities. The new leadership team is energetic, well informed and has the capacity to move the school forward. New initiatives like the increased use of technology have the potential to provide students access to structured programs and raise the quality of the education that they are receiving.

### **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 undeveloped.**

The school collects data from an appropriate variety of sources, which include Brigance, New York State Alternate Assessment, and teacher-developed assessment tools, to monitor progress. However, the system used to measure the progress made by students with complex needs is not used effectively. Academic data systems are consistent at each site with specific information pertinent to each population and grade. Other systems are used by the administration to analyze student behavior and draw up behavior plans but are not uniform throughout the school. Attendance data is regularly collected, as are the views of parents through discussion and survey.

Every student has an assessment portfolio that provides some information about progress and what each individual knows and can do. They lack detail, however, and are therefore limited in identifying clearly the next learning steps. Senior staff monitor these for compliance and quality. These assessments are used in the best practice to plan the next learning activities, but this is not a consistent feature. Teachers also keep their own day-to-day assessments of students called 'anecdotal' that are used to support and direct their instruction with individual students. Where data is carefully analyzed, for instance when identifying those students capable of travel or integration in to general education, then it becomes an effective tool. This supports further development opportunities for the students and enables placements for some in appropriate learning environments.

The school does not disaggregate data to monitor the relative performance of ethnic groups or gender differences. Individualized education plans are in place for each student but the quality of these is variable. Some clearly identify specific goals and the progress towards them is regularly monitored, leading to instruction that is suitably focused on meeting identified need. In other cases there is a lack of rigor, resulting in targets that are too general and hence, superficial monitoring.

**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 undeveloped.**

School strategic plans are beginning to be developed and discussed at cabinet meetings. Goals are not yet at the stage where they can be used effectively to drive the work of all members of the school community. There is a clear desire amongst the staff to do the best for their students and this is reflected in their commitment to supporting all students, many of whom are challenging. This is a view held by parents and students who consider that teachers are concerned about students and will persevere with them until they understand. At times students consider that work is too easy or the activity not relevant to their level. Staff collaboration is limited and does not extend to detailed discussion of functional and academic goals for all students.

The implementation of inclusion plans is a successful feature of the school and is best demonstrated by the rising number of students accessing general education and the confidence with which they do it. This high-quality analysis of data is not consistent throughout the school, resulting in activities that are not appropriately matched to needs and a subsequent lack of student progress.

The school is developing a greater understanding of the needs of all students and is becoming more confident in making early interventions so preventing problems that might occur. Expectations of students vary because of the unreliability and inconsistent use of data and the inconsistent quality of instruction. Teachers consider they have high expectations but this is not reflected in some of the activities that they require students to engage in. The expectations of some guidance staff are misplaced because of their lack of experience and knowledge of suitably challenging activities.

**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 undeveloped.**

The New York State Alternate Assessments are used as the basis for the curriculum. Where teachers monitor closely what the student can do, and there is a connection between assessment and instruction, then the next steps in learning are clearly identified and implemented. There is no hierarchical structure in the curriculum and this lack of guidance leads to a random selection of what is to be taught next rather than following the needs of the student. Some less experienced staff do not know what to do next for a student, as the curriculum lacks direction.

Many of the required therapeutic and motivating experiences do not match the demands of the mandated curriculum, and activities need modification and differentiation to enable them to impact on learning. Teachers generally follow the prescribed activities from the assessment materials, but planning is superficial. They do not sufficiently contextualise and modify activities so that they support the learning process. Activities often do not make sense to the student or develop their functional needs. Where a successful match of task to performance level does occur, students, for example those on work-study, make good progress, learn new skills and increase their credentials to secure employment. The practice for students who integrate into general education is well developed. The teacher is confident in her role because she has recourse to the assistant principal for support. The curriculum is modified and scheduling realigned to allow students to access the curriculum with confidence.

The absence of a leadership team has made it difficult for the principal to support teachers or to hold them to account. The budget has been sensibly used to invest in interactive technology that will enable all students to access an appropriate curriculum and, importantly, will direct the next experiences and learning steps for individual students. This exciting innovation is still in its infancy so the impact is not yet measurable. Staffing and scheduling are appropriately focused upon student needs.

Despite some shortcomings in instructional practice, staff display a high degree of commitment to the personal, physical and emotional needs of the students. This commitment is recognized and valued by students who are pleased to be in school, relate well to each other and consider that they can approach staff if they are concerned about something. Since the principal has been in the position, there has been an increase in attendance and the school is active in following up absentees.

**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 principal has clearly identified the needs of the school. He has made two crucial appointments of assistant principals, whose talents are well matched to the areas that are in need of development. Coaches are already modeling and supporting instruction and assessment, which have individual student progress at their core.

There had been a lack of professional development prior to the principal arriving. He has rightly identified this as a priority and all staff have had the opportunity to access support following a self-evaluation of need. Staff are also moved between sites for personal development and to develop effective teams. They feel that their work is valued and welcome the opportunity to exchange ideas during team meetings. These act as a forum for discussion and are a constructive learning experience. The principal recognizes that this desire to learn and do the best for all students is a positive feature of the school and is a good base on which to build. These steps are beginning to have a positive impact on both confidence and instructional practice.

The principal does observe instruction but because of other demands on his time and, until recently, a diminished leadership team, he has not been in a position to make this a regular occurrence. As a result, he does not know the strengths and weaknesses of all staff and is unable as yet to direct staff to specific professional development. He is aware of this and is eager to tackle the matter.

Students, staff and parents respect the principal for his quiet but effective leadership style and the stability he has brought. He has the capacity to effect further change. The school runs smoothly for the most part and structures are in place to serve the complex routines that characterize this school. Partnerships with other schools, therapeutic agencies and work-study placements effectively support the care that students receive and provide valuable life experiences for those involved.

**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 undeveloped.**

Those plans that are specific to modification or development in curriculum and instruction are raised at the regular instructional cabinet meetings. Annual goals are contained in the individualized education plans and school data is analyzed by the administration to set the goals and objectives each year for the Comprehensive Education Plan. The school has analyzed the progress of students and reflected on how best, given their needs, they can access the curriculum.

When data shows a need, the school is responsive, although there is much to do. For example, the school has invested heavily in technology that will enable each student, via a multi-media laboratory and associated equipment, to engage with programs that match their assessed need and indicate further steps in learning. Staff have received some training but this will need to be reinforced and revisited to ensure they are continually apprised of the potential this technology offers. The enthusiasm and expertise of those implementing the system are a good basis towards meeting student need.

Student progress is monitored to ascertain their ability to integrate or travel and alterations made to programs to accommodate a change in circumstance. This revision is a positive feature on which to build in other aspects of the school's work. In the best classes, students are assessed to see if activities meet student need and support changed as appropriate but this assessment is not consistently applied across the school.

The principal and his new leadership team are beginning to monitor goals at both strategic and operational levels and using this information to plan the next steps in the school's development. The principal is clear about the direction of the school but has not yet been fully successful in clearly communicating this to all staff and making his expectations of what he requires of them overt.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Connie Lekas School (PS 811)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>	X		

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>	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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>	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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>	X		

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>	X		
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>	X		