



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The John H Finley School

Public School 129

**425 West 130 Street
New York
NY 10027**

Principal: Odelphia Pierre

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Reviewer: Mike Doran

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 129 predominantly draws its multi-ethnic pre-kindergarten to sixth grade student intake from District 5 of Region 10 in Manhattan, plus a small but significant intake from re-housed families in other parts of the City. Its current population of 511 students reflects the cultural diversity of the neighborhood: 52% Black, 46% Hispanic, 0.2% White and 2% Asian and other backgrounds. In addition the school has a growing recent immigrant population. The school also has growing numbers of special education students (56) and English language learners (53). These figures are broadly in line with other City and similar schools. The percentage of students (89%) who are known to be eligible for Title 1 funding is high compared with City and similar schools. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The school has a strong commitment to enabling students to achieve both academically and in terms of personal development. The school has developed a distinctive curriculum with a special focus on the arts, supported by a wide range of external partnerships within the City. The school has also introduced an integrated technology program across the curriculum, supported by a technology teacher.

Following the recent introduction of systematic monitoring and reward systems, attendance is now in line with City and similar schools. Suspensions are low compared with City and similar schools, and are reducing still further.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides manages the school well and leads with clarity of vision and direction.
- The principal is supported by a professional and committed administrator and the teaching teams.
- High expectations, shared with the students and parents, drive the work of the school.
- Parents highly value the work of the principal and the school staff.
- The school provides a calm, orderly, safe and very supportive learning environment for the students.
- Students are well behaved and have a positive, responsible and enthusiastic attitude to their learning.
- Staff are very supportive of one-another, and they are well supported by a high quality professional development program.
- Technology is widely used to support teaching and learning in the classroom.
- A strong arts program enhances the academic program, which is also well supported by the extensive out-of-school activities program.
- The 'workshop method' of teaching, used across the school, provides an effective lesson planning structure.

What the school needs to improve

- Further develop and consistently implement internal baseline and formative assessments to better inform and adapt lesson planning, the setting of challenging goals and the close monitoring of student progress.
- Make more effective use of student performance data, aligned to an appropriate range of teaching strategies, to further differentiate the delivery of instructional programs across all subjects.
- Further extend the analysis and use of student performance data in setting goals and monitoring the progress of the school's Comprehensive Education Plan.
- Extend teachers' use of technology when managing and analyzing assessment data to inform their planning.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with some well-developed features

Since her appointment in 1999, the principal has been successful in giving the school a clear vision and a sense of direction. The distinctive focus is on the arts. This is integrated with the wider curriculum, and draws on professional expertise from within and outside the school and is giving the students good opportunities to achieve and to raise their self-esteem.

The use of technology as a learning tool in the classroom is already well developed, and the school is well placed to further extend its use by the teaching staff in the management of assessment and planning data.

The school's increasing use of internal qualitative and quantitative data has resulted in the improving performance of the students. The school's greatest strength lies in the detailed picture it builds up of each of its students, enabling it to promote high expectations for achievement but without losing sight of the need for individual personal development and support.

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 and analyzes a wide range of data relating to the performance and progress of individuals and groups of students. This includes information from standardized tests, tests produced by teachers to monitor learning in subject areas of the curriculum, and continuous assessment during lessons. This data is scrutinized by the school's extended cabinet, and by grade teams. They work in collaboration to monitor the progress of each student in order to indicate next steps in learning and, where necessary, refer to the academic intervention team for more detailed monitoring and support. Gap analysis is also used to identify and rectify particular weaknesses in the instructional programs and their delivery. The focus, however, tends to be on recent and current student performance, rather than taking a more in depth and longitudinal perspective.

Assessments data plays an important role in informing instructional planning on a continuous basis. However, the school recognizes the need to further develop the school's baseline testing to inform curriculum and instructional planning in all subjects at the start of each grade. Also, systems for the internal gathering of student data are more fully developed in English language arts and mathematics than they are in other subject areas. Data management is still largely paper-based and teachers would welcome the use of technology to help their management and analysis of assessment data.

The school has a clear policy for monitoring the progress of every student throughout the year and timely contact is made with parents during each marking period to address any concerns.

The recent and current progress of students in each subject area of the curriculum, class by class, grade by grade is scrutinized to inform whole-school planning. However, the school recognizes the need to further extend data collection for longitudinal comparative analysis and for the analysis of the data for particular sub-groups.

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 school has high expectations of its students. The current progress of students is monitored closely and, where there is a concern, parents are involved, and students are immediately referred for effective support and intervention programs.

The school recognizes that teachers need to more rigorously and consistently integrate data from standardized tests and from assessments in the classroom into the planning for students’ next steps and into the setting of challenging goals for the students. The school also recognizes the need to further extend its use of data to inform planning and the setting and monitoring of goals at the whole-school level.

The school has well-established organizational structures that encourage collaborative working at grade level in developing the curriculum, instructional programs and assessment. The high level of trust that exists between staff means that teachers are not afraid to share reflection on their practice and make improvements.

The literacy and math coaches play a valuable role in ensuring that school’s programs for literacy and math link with teaching points in other subjects. The technology teacher works effectively across grades and subjects providing support to teachers in the use of technology to support teaching and learning in their classes.

The school communicates clearly with parents and involves them from the start of their child’s learning. The school provides a wide range of curriculum events for parents to encourage them to support their child’s learning at home. Parents appreciate the ready access they have to staff and the timeliness with which teachers let them know of any concerns.

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.

The school’s curriculum is firmly based on high expectations of students and the regular review of their current progress. All teachers are involved in curriculum development as they review and evaluate the impact of their teaching. In this way, the school has been very successful in developing its instructional programs to meet the needs of its students.

A range of programs have been introduced to promote learning and support students and parents, including for example, the Accelerated Reading Program, 'Power Saturday', Gifted and Talented kindergarten class, 'New York Scores', 'After-school math', and the 'Harlem Six Demonstration School'.

Staff are held to account for the progress made by the students in their charge and plan Instructional programs that require students to be active participants in learning. Much teaching is of good quality, with some of it of a very high standard. Lessons are generally well planned and structured follow the 'workshop model', and are differentiated by the well judged use of individual and group activities. The use of small group work is under development and offers the potential for closer and more focused assessment and support for students in the classroom, such as guided reading. Collaborative working in pairs and in groups is a positive feature of many classes, and students respond positively and enjoy these interactions. Some student discussion is of high quality and contributes significantly to their learning. Students feel safe to try out ideas and solutions so that they are able to respond to challenges without fear of 'being wrong'. Information technology is recognized as a powerful learning tool in the classroom and continues to be developed. The school recognizes that some teachers require sustained professional development support in order to implement many of these approaches more consistently.

Students' attitudes to learning and their behavior are very good. Attendance is now in line with City-wide and similar school averages. Student attendance is monitored closely and pro-actively pursued. Students are very appreciative of the openness and approachability of staff. They are able to identify a staff member with whom they would wish to discuss issues of concern. They also confirm that the principal's open-door policy works in practice.

Knowledge and data about student performance drives key decisions about the budget and resources, including staffing. Appropriate levels of funding are focused on the professional development of staff, and on the school improvements strategies and goals identified in the school's Comprehensive Education Plan.

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 with some well developed features.

The school carefully selects staff using a range of criteria and procedures, such as modelling a lesson, and involves the administrators and other lead staff in a rigorous interview process. The staff composition reflects and provides role modelling for the multi-ethnic intake of the school.

Professional development is firmly based on a continuous drive to improve student achievement. It is well managed by the dual cabinet structure in consultation with staff and draws effectively on the monitoring of the school's performance. Newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the school confirm that the school provides an extremely supportive professional environment for all staff. Discussion and debate in grade teams is an important part of professional development. The school provides a good allocation of individual planning time for teachers, with carefully scheduled common time for teams to meet. This provides a forum for planning interventions, collaborative team teaching, and revising decisions in the light of new information. Staff expertise is deployed effectively to support grade teams, through collaborative planning and teaching.

The school is a calm and orderly place, and is welcoming to students, parents and visitors. The principal, assistant principals, and other lead staff are well respected, and provide a model, not only of their high expectations, but also of their care and commitment to students and their families.

Formal and informal monitoring and evaluation provide evidence of the effective implementation of strategies and developments. Staff are self-evaluating and regularly reflect upon the impact of their work. The principal and assistant principals regularly and systematically observe instructional practice and provide feedback to teachers, which in turn informs planning for professional development overseen by the dual cabinets. The coaches follow through with professional support as appropriate.

The school is also very concerned to provide opportunities for the development of broader skills and interests and offers enrichment and extension activities to interest and engage students. In this respect, a strong integrated arts program, under-pinned by partnerships with external professionals and organizations, is central to the vision of the school and provides a distinctive enhancement to the academic program, and to the extensive out-of-school activities program.

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.

Staff at all levels are clear that they have responsibility for assessing and analyzing students' progress, for planning, for setting goals for students, and for evaluating and revising interventions according to need. However, the school recognizes that this is not always consistently carried out by all staff and across all subject areas. Students are also engaged in the review process and have a formal voice in the decision making process through their 'student council'.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is an effective working document, regularly reviewed as a whole throughout the year, and overseen by the school leadership team. In addition, elements of the plan are reviewed in the dual cabinet meetings and in the principal's regular discussions with particular teams such as the grade teams. However, the school recognizes the need to extend the depth and longitudinal analysis and the use of student performance data to better inform the annual Comprehensive Education Plan. In this way it can better take account of the starting points of students through consideration of value-added performance data, and shape the school's plans and goals accordingly.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Public School 129	∅	✓	+
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	