



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Sojourner Truth School

Public School 149

**41 West 117th Street
New York
NY 10026**

Principal: Shanquia Singletary

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Reviewer: Charles Lupton

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Sojourner Truth School is a pre-kindergarten through 8th grade elementary and middle school serving 503 students. After 5th grade students choose to either stay at the school or transfer to other middle schools and other students may join the school from other elementary schools. The school is divided into three academies, each with an assistant principal, one for kindergarten through 2nd grade, one for grades 3 through 5 and one for grades 6 through 8.

The school serves an ethnic mix of students with 76% Black students, 21% Hispanic students and 1% Asian and other. The proportion of special education students is 11% and 9% are English language learners who speak a variety of languages. All instruction is in English. The school receives Title 1 funding with 58% eligibility. The attendance rate is 90%, which is just below similar and other City schools.

The Sojourner Truth School is an empowerment school. Empowerment schools have 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 and her administration team are held in exceptionally high regard and have the clear capacity to continue to drive the school forward.
- The staff team is very cohesive and works collaboratively to improve instruction and support the students socially.
- The school has a good grasp on the use of data to inform instruction, including the use of differentiated instruction.
- The school has a wide range of effective enrichment activities that support the curriculum well.
- The school is carefully structured into three very effective academies that work well together under the guidance of three good assistant principals.
- All classes follow the same lesson format and process charts are used well and consistently to aid instruction.
- The school environment is attractive with bulleting boards celebrating student work and success, raising expectations.
- The relationships between all members of the school community are positive and trusting so the students behave very well and are mutually supportive.
- High expectations of student progress are clearly communicated to the parents and to the students, who clearly believe they can succeed.
- All students are included in the extended day and an additional 'zero period' has been introduced before school to support students further.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop the school's capacity to maximize the use of existing data to monitor the progress of academies and grades.
- Refine quantitative data analysis systems to improve the tracking and performance of student groups, including ethnic groups, higher achieving students and other groups of interest to the school.
- When planning for school development, ensure that goals include objectively measurable, interim success criteria to monitor its impact more effectively, adjusting the planning if necessary.
- Continue to facilitate and enhance professional development, ensuring that all received training is turn-keyed and used uniformly throughout the school to impact on learning.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with well-developed features.

Since her appointment in 2003, the principal, with her administration team, have had a very positive influence on the school, transforming it into a community with a shared vision and real drive for the school and the students to succeed. Teachers work hard and are collaborative, reflective practitioners. They are held closely accountable for their instruction, resulting in students who are motivated to learn and engaged in their classes.

The school runs smoothly and the student behavior is good, largely because of the clear procedures and open, trusting relationships between all members of the community, including the parents. The school uses quantitative and qualitative data well to inform and differentiate instruction. As an empowerment school, the school is currently engaged in a research project to monitor relative performance of different sexes, ethnic students and lower achieving students in a more informative way.

Although the school generates a wealth of good data that is used constructively, it is less effective in fully utilizing the data to set clear objective measures of success and to monitor the progress of its development plans.

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.

Through the combination of available and school-generated qualitative and quantitative data the school gains a very good understanding of the performance and progress of students in English language arts and mathematics. In these subjects, the school has a good appreciation of the achievement of each individual student and the data is combined well to build a clear overview of the performance of classes and grades. However, quantitative data is not used as effectively to monitor the progress of the lower grades or to quantify the relative performance of each academy. Although good qualitative data is used well, it is not fully utilized to provide empirical data, for example, by collating report card data.

Data is used well to chart the school's good academic development over time and to compare its performance with similar and City schools and local schools that are operating in equivalent environments. The school uses data effectively to track the progress of English language learners and special education students and other categories of interest such as students on the cusp of level 2 and level 3 and readers in all grades. The school is less effective in comparing its performance in relation to ethnicity and other identified groups such as by gender.

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 well developed.

Since her appointment in 2003, the principal has improved significantly the level of collaboration within the staff and has built a highly effective administration and staff team who work very well together to drive school improvement. All members of the school community, including the parents, are clearly appreciative of the positive change this has brought about in all facets of the school, particularly by bringing structure, rigor and high expectations of teachers and students.

All members of staff, the parents and other partners work together very well to ensure the school's goals to improve school performance and instructional quality are realized as fully as possible. Most planning contains demanding, data-led goals for long-term development but the goals are more aspirational than derived from careful data analysis. Clear plans for individual teacher development contain timeframes and an indication of monitoring through data. However, this practice is not developed into whole school planning. As a result, even though plans are revisited very regularly throughout the year, the school does not have an accurate measure of its progress towards its goals. The goals themselves are clearly focused on the whole school, including each academic subject, class and grade but without losing sight of the needs of the individual and identified groups.

The academic intervention team have a clear appreciation of the requirements of students identified as having particular needs and focus well on developing effective intervention strategies that support these students. This support includes reaching out to support families in the community if this will help the student.

The school is very effective in pro-actively communicating high expectations to the students and the parents, who are very appreciative of the quality of information they receive about their child's progress. Posters and murals that positively encourage success are widely displayed throughout the school. The school operates an effective open door policy that encourages parents to be active participants in the school, resulting in good levels of support and parental commitment to the school. For example, the school runs workshops that help parents to take an active role in their child's learning and hosts General Equivalency Diploma classes. Students are well informed about how well they are doing and the teachers explain how they might improve their work.

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 well developed.

The school follows the mandated curriculum and thoughtfully supplements this with interlinking commercial schemes. These provide good quantitative data sources to monitor student achievement and provide constructive work analysis that informs instruction. This, combined with comprehensive qualitative data, is utilized to plan for differentiated instruction effectively, resulting in the very significant majority of students being actively engaged in their work. There is good conformity of approach with common lesson formats in each class with constructive process charts that inform student learning. Many classes are supported by para-professionals and by Peace worker volunteers. Teachers are held closely accountable for their performance through data and class observation by the administration team. Issues are readily identified and good support is provided to improve practice. Teachers remarked that the administration also give positive

feedback.

The budget is used well to support instruction. For example, new, leveled libraries have been established in each class to fortify the school-wide drive to improve reading and an additional teacher was hired to strengthen reading in the school. Equivalent decisions have led to scheduling and staffing changes. For example, the extended day is taught during the school day to ensure all the students attend, especially those identified as most in need. Additionally, the school is structured so that common preparation periods do not clash with English language arts classes, resulting in each class having two teachers for literacy. Qualitative data indicates that this is a successful strategy.

The core curriculum is enhanced very well. Each teacher teaches an additional subject of personal interest giving students a genuine opportunity to shine in less academic ways. The students are very appreciative of this and enjoy these classes. This element of the school is a further example of how staffing, scheduling and budgetary decisions are taken to benefit the students.

The level of mutual respect and trust between students and students and staff is very good and classroom management is good. This results in a very positive school atmosphere in which students behave very well, feel comfortable to work hard and support each other.

The school is diligent in maintaining and seeking to improve attendance rates, which is a high priority for the school. Effective methods are used to achieve this including rigorous intervention and the use of incentive schemes such as celebration assemblies, badges and medals for 100% attendance.

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 has been successful in recruiting good teachers for the school who must actively engage with the school vision, be committed to their own learning and be a team player. The use of data has not been integral to the hiring process but professional development is provided school-wide to build this capacity. Good mentoring is provided for teachers, especially those newly hired.

Professional development is seen as fundamental to school development, is identified in a variety of ways and is used comprehensively to support instruction. Professional development is sourced from within the school with additional services provided by the Teachers College and other external agencies. For example, the science curriculum is actively supported with a weekly teacher mentor visit. Teachers are reflective practitioners and professional development is turn-keyed and generally implemented in the classrooms although the principal is aware that the school needs to develop processes to ensure this is consistent.

Frequent formal and informal observations by the principal and assistant principals are clearly focused and aligned to the school goals. The observations are well documented and include clear developmental pointers. These are followed through well by the administration team and by the effective coach, resulting in continuous improvement. The staff work well together collegiately during grade and faculty meetings and frequent informal collaborations, supporting each other in planning and new ideas that combines to drive instructional development. The administration team uses data well, including that for differing class performance, to facilitate professional debate, resulting in a good level of

appreciation of its use and clear relationship to expectations of student performance.

The principal is held in universally high regard and has the clear capacity to continue the trend of school improvement. She knows each student and member of staff well and, according to the teachers, has an uncanny ability to move people into their proper niche. The school runs smoothly. It aligns well with support services and outside bodies to achieve academic goals.

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 Comprehensive Education Plan is a thorough document that is produced as the result of intense collaborative effort. Although data analysis informs school planning and is effective in identifying the school's foci for the year, the long-term goals derived from the data are not wholly realistic when compared to current performance as data shows that some grades are more likely to attain the goals than others. School-wide goals are set rather than by grade or academy. The plan does not contain any interim, objective measures of success so the school is not in a strong position to know how effective its planning is. The administration team is aware that this issue needs to be addressed. Despite this, the school has collected good qualitative data that has been used to judge that it is on track to achieve most of its targets for the year.

Using the qualitative data, the collaborative administration team is fully aware of how the school is realizing the goals contained in the Comprehensive Education Plan. As a result, school planning builds upon previous plans and is adaptable in its implementation. The principal is adept in analyzing plans and finding solutions. For example, the writers' workshop model was introduced in September but comparison of student progress indicated that it was not as effective as expected. This resulted in a changed strategy from January with new observational checklists to ensure conformity throughout the school.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Sojourner Truth School (PS 149)	∅	✓	+
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	