



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Tribeca Learning Center

Public School 150

**334 Greenwich Street
New York
NY 10028**

Principal: Maggie Siena

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Reviewer: Deidre Farmbry

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 150 is a pre-kindergarten through grade 5 school with 178 students. The school is small, with only one class per grade. The principal has been at the school since November, 2005.

The school is located in the Tribeca section of lower Manhattan. The student population is 68.5 % White, 14.5 % Hispanic, 10% Black, and 7 % Asian. The percentage of students receiving special education services and the percentage of English language learners are far below those of other schools across the City. The same applies to the percentage of immigrant students. The school is not Title I eligible. The attendance rate is 94.4%, which is about the same as the rate at similar schools and slightly higher than the rate of 92.8% for other New York City schools.

Students' parents are very active in supporting the school, raising large sums of money to provide various enrichment opportunities that enhance the academic program. The school takes pride in its excellent academic record of high student achievers.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school effectively compiles and analyses data to monitor students' progress.
- The school's small size engenders a strong sense of community.
- The school has successfully designed instructional programs that help the students think deeply and critically.
- The parents successfully fundraise to provide stimulating enrichment activities which contribute strongly to the academic and social development of the students.
- The principal's open door policy gives students, staff and parents a voice in contributing to the positive development of the school.
- Students in need of academic interventions receive successfully personalized assistance before, during and after school.
- The new principal uses her breadth of knowledge and wide experience to build upon the school's existing strengths.
- The school has used its exemption from New York City Board of Education curriculum constructively and successfully revisits and refines the content and sequence of instructional material.
- The school has developed outstanding partnerships with the community that result in positive programs for the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Seek, develop and maintain connections with a "partner" school for the infusion of fresh ideas, alternative perspectives and professional networking.
- Identify sooner those students who may need academic interventions, and make frequent and comprehensive use of data to check their progress.
- Strengthen lines of communication.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

This is a well-developed school that uses all available data very effectively. It knows each student's current academic level and areas for growth, focused on high standards. Since the school is small and with only one class per grade level, the staff know the students well enough to discuss their progress across all grades. Staff have these discussions formally in meetings and informally on a daily basis. Therefore, very few students go off track. Students, staff and parents like the distinctive aspect of a small, nurturing school. Students enjoy close relationships with their grade peers and with students in other grades to whom they act as learning buddies.

Parents excel in raising funds, enabling students to have great social and character building enrichment activities such as ballroom dancing and visits from well known authors. Parents pride themselves as advocates for the school. They use their resources and networks to supplement the well-developed instructional program and help students to high levels of achievement.

The school's recently appointed principal acknowledges the strengths of an exemplary teaching staff, while bringing to the school new ideas. The principal compiles and analyses data to help understand the developmental needs of the school. She has developed a positive rapport with staff, students and parents who all support her efforts fully.

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 well developed.

The school uses all available data provided by the district. In addition, school leaders and faculty collect a range of data from sources such as end of unit tests, teacher made tests, standardized assessments and running records. The teachers keep conference notes of discussions about progress which they have with their students. An innovative practice is that of asking students to assess their own progress. Teachers use these written sources of data, as well as informal discussion with each other to track students' progress over time. Since the school is small, teachers value these informal exchanges of information as much as the written documentation. The school's systems for tracking data have proven very successful, given the high percentage of students who score exceptionally highly on standardized tests.

For students receiving special education services, the school's pupil personnel team relies on data from teachers on each child's progress. The team then monitors closely the achievements of each special education student.

The school checks its progress against itself previous results annually. As an external benchmark, it compares itself to two similar schools located in the same neighborhood.

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.

Collaborative planning involves all teachers, since there is only one class at each grade level. Discussions about data involve the entire staff. They discuss the progress of their current students and provide information about former students, since they know them well. Goals and plans focus on individual children, classrooms, and the school as a whole. Such comprehensive planning works well because of the school’s small size. However, the principal knows that some teachers need more assistance in understanding the finer detail of the data and how to make instructional adjustments on what the data shows.

The pupil personnel committee meets to plan interventions for students who have been identified as needing additional assistance. However, teachers in pre-kindergarten, first grade and second grade do not always bring students to the committee’s attention at the first sign of difficulty, for a program of intervention to be put in place as early as possible. For instance, from information presented by the school there is general acknowledgement that one student currently receiving interventions in the upper grades, might have been identified for earlier support in a lower grade.. Once students are identified as being in need of interventions, they have the opportunity to participate in an extended day program and receive additional help during the school day.

Parents are informed of students’ progress at report card conferences and through notes frequently sent home by teachers. Parents say they always have access to their child’s teacher to provide information and have no difficulty in getting information from the school. Some parents of students who receive special education support services from providers such as therapists and other external agents stated that they often have to play a strong role as parent advocate by initiating outreach and coordinating services.

Goals and plans for improving the school drive the activities of leaders, staff, students, parents and the whole school community. For instance, a large community fundraiser planned mainly by parents, results in sufficient funds to supplement the school’s programs in art and music, and provide exciting trips for students.

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.

Curricular exemptions from the New York City Board of Education have enabled the school to successfully designed an instructional program that engages students and results in very high rates of success on achievement tests. For reading and writing, the school implements a balanced approach to literacy. There are high quality classroom libraries with books graded by difficulty and many displays of students’ writing. Students are given clear guidance on how to select a “just right” book. The mathematics and science programs use “hands on” activities which students say ‘helps to make learning fun’. Under the principal’s guidance, teachers are mapping out units of work for social studies.

The classroom environment is exciting, with students immersed in critical thinking. This is underpinned by their teachers' skillful use of questioning techniques. The display of projects and range of work in students' folders serve as further evidence that teachers are successfully providing different ways for students to learn and demonstrate what they know. The teachers see themselves as fully accountable for students' outcomes and make sure that they provide lessons that actively engage students and develop in them a thirst for knowledge. As one student put it, "You don't have to be the smartest person in the world because our teachers make sure that you understand the work."

School improvement is at the heart of budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions. For instance, the principal made a strategic decision to hire administrative support to free her up from duties such as lunch duty so that she could spend more time in classrooms focusing on teaching and learning. Those interested in being a part of the teaching staff must do a demonstration lesson so their level of competency can be assessed. In planning the schedule, the principal creatively mapped out common meeting time for teachers of grades kindergarten-2 and grades 3-5 to meet together each week. In addition, all teachers have lunch at the same time, thus facilitating professional dialogue.

The students feel that there is at least one adult in the school they can go to if they have a problem. They take pride in knowing their teachers well. Similarly, teachers expressed that one of the positive aspects of working in a small environment was that they remain closely in touch with students, even when they are no longer in their class.

Enrichment activities focusing primarily on the arts make for a well-rounded learning experience. Students take ballroom dancing, study architecture, and go on many trips. All of these experiences give them additional areas in which to excel. Students are eager to talk about something they know they do well. This extremely positive climate contributes to very high attendance rates as students thoroughly enjoy coming to school. When they are absent for several days, their parents know that they will receive a call from the school and must send in an absence note.

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.

Staff have high expectations for student achievement and are aware of the critical role of professional development in enabling them to help students reach high standards. The teachers willingly seek opportunities to improve their craft, as for example by attending mathematics workshops offered by the district. These have been successful, as the principal judges that mathematics teaching is strong at the school. Teacher's College representatives who visit the school fifteen times per year offer professional development in literacy. On site, there is a math staff developer for all grades.

The school runs smoothly, although some parents and staff stated the need for clearer communications, particularly since the new principal has introduced changes that they feel warrant greater clarity for compliance and execution. The principal is aware that some aspects of transition need to be resolved. She is receptive to ideas and has an open door policy to facilitate staff and parental engagement.

The principal observes classes more frequently than she did last year because she now has an additional person to assist with administrative duties. Feedback, both formal and informal is provided following observations. The principal covers classes when teachers want to make scheduled visits to other classrooms to share strategies. However, teachers do not visit each other's classrooms very often. Nevertheless, they do communicate informally with each other about their teaching practices.

The principal understands the distinct challenges associated with successful schools, particularly the challenge of averting complacency when current practices regularly produce good results. In addition, the principal is aware of the need to broaden professional exposure for teachers in a context where there is only one class per grade. The principal and teachers look beyond themselves for additional ideas for continuous professional growth, such as a partner school for collaboration. The principal has started introducing new ideas, guided by her previous experience. Parents stated that the principal's capacity to infuse additional perspectives and ideas is one of the qualities they admire and support.

The school has a partnership with Manhattan Youth, an external group that runs an after school program. Students participating in the program enjoy themselves and engage in a range of physical fitness activities. A partnership with the Tribeca Arts Center provides an opportunity for students to do a culminating performance to demonstrate their talents.

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 well developed.

The main mechanism for evaluating each student's progress is the frequent sharing of information between staff, which the size of the school facilitates. When the principal holds a cabinet meeting, the entire teaching staff is present since each teacher is the sole representative of a grade. All of the teachers have lunch at the same time, which enables the staff lunchroom to be the focus of child-centered conversation. Full staff meetings each month and weekly meetings of teachers across specific grades provide opportunities to check students' progress against goals and to plan interventions or modifications, where necessary.

One area where the school is adjusting its practice is the referrals for special education services. Upon taking up post, the principal viewed the referral rate as disproportionately high for a school where the data indicated fewer challenges than for other New York City Public Schools and with test scores that were much higher. As a result, the school is closely examining its classroom practice and intervention strategies to be sure that they are making the best use of resources to support children prior to making initial referrals.

The school's primary interest in comparing progress is measuring progress against itself, with a goal of retaining the high percentages of students scoring at levels 3 and 4. For the few students who are not there yet, the aim is to ensure that appropriate diagnostic instruments are used to yield data to help plan appropriate intervention. When making wider comparisons, the principal looks at data from schools with similar demographics. Few schools, however, match its small size.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Tribeca Learning Center (PS 150)	∅	✓	+
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