



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Ella Baker School

Public School/Middle School 225

**317 East 67 Street
New York
NY 10021**

Principal: Laura Garcia

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Reviewer: Jean Mackie

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The school is located in the Julia Richman Complex in East Manhattan. The enrollment is 273, with students from age 3 up to grade 8. The school population comprises 44% Black students and 41% Hispanic students with the remaining 15% of students being either of Asian or other ethnicity. Five percent are special education students and almost 6% are English language learners. There are only a very small number of students who join the school as recent arrivals to the country and these mainly come from the Dominican Republic. The school is not eligible for Title 1 funding. The attendance rate, at 91.8% in 2005, was just below that of similar schools and broadly in line with the City average. The students are grouped into multi-age classes.

The school is designated an Empowerment School by the New York City Department of Education. Empowerment schools have more flexibility to make decisions and control the resources for their school community. They are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose schools to affiliate with and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements. Another feature of Empowerment Schools, including this one, is participating in a research project to design its own periodic assessment processes.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides clear vision and direction for the work of the school.
- The school collects a wide range of data about individual students to identify what they have learned and to inform their next steps.
- Open spaces and classrooms are stimulating environments in which students' work is displayed and celebrated.
- Teachers provide some good opportunities for students to work in groups, discuss ideas and take responsibility for their own learning.
- The dedicated teachers are reflective practitioners and regularly encourage students to evaluate their own learning.
- Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classes provide strong foundations for learning in the rest of the school.
- The curriculum is broad and is enriched by good opportunities for art, dance and music.
- The students enjoy school and value the strong relationships that they develop with their teachers and other adults in the school.
- There is a strong commitment to professional development with good opportunities for collaborative planning.
- The school provides a safe and secure environment, which supports the learning of the students.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue the work on developing consistent and reliable interim assessment systems to enable the regular tracking of progress of students both across subjects and as they move through the school.
- Continue with the developments to improve the teaching and achievement of students in mathematics.
- Formalize the systems for evaluating the impact of professional development on outcomes for students.
- Use the extensive data about individuals to set more specific long term and interim goals for the school.
- Strengthen further the use of data to inform differentiated instruction.
- Continue the focused development work with students at risk to ensure that they progress as well as they can.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The principal's strong drive and vision for The Ella Baker School underpin the focused commitment to the personal growth and well being of each individual student. This is reflected by the caring and nurturing climate within this small school environment. Open spaces and classrooms are stimulating environments in which students' work is displayed and celebrated. Individual data is used well to monitor progress and inform each student's next learning steps. The curriculum is enriched by good opportunities for creative and performing arts. There is some lively instruction which engages the students. Professional development is a strong feature in the school and is used effectively to evaluate and share practice. At present, however, systems for evaluating the impact of professional development on outcomes for students at class level are not as rigorous as they could be. Students enjoy coming to school. They and their parents value the personal attention that is given to individuals. Appropriate steps are being taken to secure more reliable and consistent periodic assessments to support the school in achieving its aim of continual growth for the students in its care. The school is not complacent and is continually looking to improve teaching and learning.

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 uses an appropriate range of data, including State and City tests, to check overall performance and monitor progress at whole school level. Trends in performance are noted, as is the comparison with similar schools. The school is particularly focused on the development of the individual child and has an extensive range of data on each of its students, including running records, reading and writing conference notes and work samples. In this way the teachers are developing an in-depth understanding of each student's needs and using this to inform their next steps.

The school is in the process of developing its own interim assessments so that it can use the wealth of data on individuals more systematically to track progress of students both across subjects and as they move through the school. There is a recognition that, to do this effectively, the assessment systems need to be consistent and reliable. The school has used the analysis of work to identify some shortcomings in the teaching and achievement of students in mathematics and is taking positive steps to tackle this. The importance of tracking cohorts of students has been recognized and is being used constructively to support the development work in mathematics.

Special education students and English language learners have their needs carefully analyzed to identify the additional support required. Given the comparatively small number of these students, their progress is tracked on an individual basis. The school has identified the need to build its capacity to provide more focused support for needy students. The school is aware of the relative performance of sub groups such as boys and

girls and different ethnic groups and has, for example, used this information to inform the selection of reading materials available for the students.

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 shared commitment of the whole school community to supporting the development and learning of each child underpins the goal setting process. The summer retreat provides a valuable opportunity for all staff to reflect on the previous year and set curriculum goals for the forthcoming year. Analysis of students’ work and reviews at professional development meetings has led to an appropriate goal of improving teaching and achievement in mathematics, which is one of three main objectives identified in the Comprehensive Education Plan for the school this year.

The staff are very focused on evaluating the students’ developments and subsequent needs. The extensive records collected are used systematically to inform the ongoing discussions with students about their progress and their next learning steps. In this way, the students are encouraged to evaluate their own learning and play an active role in setting future goals. This individual approach ensures that the needs of special education students and English language learners are carefully noted and used to inform the additional support that is then provided for them in areas such as reading. The school is looking to strengthen further this academic intervention program. There is an expectation that all classes and grades will show growth over the year and the school recognizes the need to aggregate the individual data in a more consistent way to support the setting of specific long term goals at these levels.

The high expectations of the school are well communicated to the parents through, for example, newsletters and parent teacher conferences. Parents value the feedback that they receive through the narratives, for example, about their child’s progress and what their next learning goals should be. The small school community is seen as a strength which fosters positive relationships and encourages personal growth. All of those linked to the school strive to achieve the goals and objectives set for the 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 proficient.

The curriculum is developed appropriately from the data about the students’ progress and identified needs. City and State standards provide an overarching guide to the level of planning for each class. Teachers plan to meet individual needs based on their records and are also eager to build on students’ interests. The experiences in the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classes provide strong foundations for learning in the rest of the school. There are good opportunities for all students to participate in art, dance and music. Students’ work is used regularly to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. As a result of this, the mathematics curriculum is being reviewed and developed to secure stronger progression in key ideas and concepts.

Teachers are fully committed to their students and recognize their accountability for their achievements, both personally and academically. Teachers provide some good opportunities for students to work in groups, discuss ideas and take responsibility for their own learning. There are some good examples where data is used well to group students with similar needs and then provide them with appropriately differentiated tasks, thus enabling intervention with those who require it. Consistent differentiated instruction is not always evident in classes.

Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are based appropriately on a clear identification of students' needs. Funding has been used, for example, to appoint a mathematics coach to support the development of the subject throughout the school and to provide additional expertise in the analysis of data. The school is well resourced to enable students to access a rich curriculum, with plenty of opportunities for practical experiences.

The students enjoy school and value the strong relationships that they develop with their teachers and other adults in the school. The students feel safe and secure and are happy to approach any adult at times of anxiety or concern. They respond positively to the bright and lively displays in the school of various artifacts and their own work. Attendance is a high priority. The school has noted the gradual decline, part of which has been associated with poor weather, and is taking active steps through a clear set of procedures to follow up any absentees. Given the distance that some students have to travel, lateness can be a problem and is being tackled in a similar way.

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 provides clear vision and direction for the work of the school. She is highly respected for the work she has done to develop a caring and nurturing school, where every child is an important individual. Her record is testimony to her strong capacity to effect further change. Staff who join the school are selected according to their commitment to its philosophy and as a result, there is a shared and common purpose amongst the faculty. The appointment of the mathematics coach reflects the importance placed on developing expertise in the use and analysis of data.

Professional development is a very strong feature of the school. The dedicated teachers are reflective practitioners and are continually seeking ways to improve both their own and their students' learning. Weekly meetings of the teaching and learning committee are effective in using a range of data and discussions with teachers to identify professional development needs. The subsequent sessions are well-focused with effective support from a staff developer from Sarah Lawrence College. Formal and informal classroom observations by the principal, assistant principal and mentors result in regular feedback to teachers, who value and act upon the advice given. The evaluation of practice and sharing of ideas is continually discussed during common planning time for grade level meetings, intervisitations and regular dialogue about students and their learning needs. There is a high level of professional discussion taking place throughout the school, which is leading to improvements in practice. The school is, rightly, currently focusing on strengthening teaching and learning in mathematics. At present, however, systems for

evaluating the impact of professional development on outcomes for students at class level are not as rigorous as they could be.

The very clear procedures established results in a school that runs very smoothly on a daily basis with effective communication across the whole school community. There is a good range of partnerships with organizations such as the Bloomberg 'Everybody Wins' reading program and the New York Collegium Instrumental Music program, all of whom provide regular additional support and enrichment opportunities for the students, which is much valued by them, their parents and the school.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school's ambitions for its students underpin the goals established in the Comprehensive Education Plan. The collaborative approach adopted to reach them results in a clear and shared understanding of what the school is trying to achieve this year. Although there is a clear expectation of evidence of growth, the extensive data about individuals has not been used as systematically as it could have been to set more specific medium and long term goals so that progress towards them can be measured more easily. The school is currently building on its secure practice to develop its own periodic assessments to support this process as well as to strengthen the tracking of student progress at individual, class and subject level.

The work of the school is regularly reviewed through the range of meetings and informal discussions that take place on a frequent basis. Data has been used to identify the need to strengthen both mathematics and the support for individuals at risk. Appropriate steps have been taken to tackle these areas through additional staffing, adjustments to scheduling and professional development. Students' work is also used appropriately to compare achievements across classes and in different curriculum areas.

The school is continually evaluating students' progress, their needs and next learning steps. This results in changes to the curriculum, adjustments to teaching strategies and additional support where it is needed. The strong focus on individuals means that the school is flexible, regularly responding to students' needs and realigning goals for them as their learning progresses. The principal knows the school well. Her reflective practice ensures that the work of the school is continually under scrutiny.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

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|---|---|---|---|
| SCHOOL NAME: The Ella Baker School (PS/MS 225) | ∅ | ✓ | + |
| 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 | |