



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Gwendolyn Powell Brown Computer School

Public School 242

134 West 122 Street

New York

NY 10027

Principal: Donna L. Brewster

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Reviewer: Sylvia Gatehouse

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Gwendolyn Powell Brown Computer School is a small elementary school located in Central Harlem, serving 280 enrolled students from kindergarten through grade 5. The community is home to many new immigrants from Africa. A majority of students, 88%, are Black. In addition there are 10% Hispanic and 2% American Indian students. The proportion of English language learners at 6% is smaller than similar and City schools, while the proportion of special education students at 12% is about the same.

Attendance is 93% and above that of similar schools and City schools. The school receives Title 1 funding.

The school shares a building with two charter schools and so many facilities, including the gymnasium, are shared.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal gives outstanding leadership and her management of the building is excellent.
- The assistant principal and members of the leadership team give good support and work very closely together.
- The students are courteous and polite in and around school, and show positive attitudes to their work.
- Teachers use a range of effective methods and so students are engaged and concentrate well in lessons.
- The school's instruction benefits from the services of paraprofessionals, specialist teachers and volunteers who work with students alongside teachers.
- This school runs smoothly and is a well-ordered, safe community.
- Members of staff hold the principal in high esteem and so their teamwork is a strength of the school.
- Students like school and are glad to be there, saying that their teachers listen to them and know them very well.
- Parents feel that the principal has managed change successfully, and that she is always available to talk with them.
- There is a culture of busy purposefulness in the school that successfully harnesses yet does not stifle students' natural exuberance.

What the school needs to improve

- Share the school's goals that are embedded in the Comprehensive Education Plan with all staff and parents, so everyone has a clear idea of what the school is trying to achieve in the long-term.
- Clearly detail when goals will be achieved and who is responsible for making sure planned action actually happens.
- Find additional ways to share information and involve parents more in their children's education.
- Extend the good practice in some grades of using assessment data of students' performance to plan what students should learn next.
- Find ways to integrate science and social studies into reading and writing lessons.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The school is striving to overcome many challenges, ranging from a shortage of physical space to a large number of new staff recruited at short notice. The principal is dynamic and energetically tackles these challenges following a range of development strategies that are identified in the Comprehensive Education Plan. The school is moving along a broad front of planned improvements towards a clearly defined set of goals. Until this year, settling the school down, improving students' behavior and attitudes to learning, and managing a building which houses two schools as well as her own, have been time-consuming and over-riding priorities. The school has established a safe learning environment for its students, who now have good working attitudes.

The principal has managed these considerable challenges extremely successfully, with a deep concern for the students in her care and the community in which they live.

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 collects a comprehensive range of good quality, test data and the school's own assessments that records students' performance and progress in tested subjects. Each teacher has an assessment folder, full of students' standardized performance data that ensures there is detailed information to show what each student is able to do and understands. The folders are working documents reflecting teachers' on-going assessments in English language arts and mathematics for the class as a whole, and for individual students. Student portfolios log individual progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers are competent in interpreting the data and identifying groups for additional support and extension including, special education students, English language learners, those new to the country, and students who are at risk of not reaching grade standards or who could be moved up a level to exceed the standards. The school looks at the performance and progress of other ethnic groups only within its procedures for tracking individual student's performance and progress. It does not yet compare how well these students do as a group with other students in school.

The school compares how well students perform class by class and grade by grade during its many team meeting discussions. Coaches look closely at how different elements of reading, writing and mathematics are performing across the school and plan programs to address any weaknesses noted from assessments. The school compares its test results with similar and other City schools to note the year on year improvement in tested subjects.

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.

In its determination to drive up test scores, the school has a clear process for setting measurable goals for improvement in English language arts and mathematics. These are embedded in action plans drawn up by the coaches and included in the Comprehensive Education Plan. The principal and her assistant, together with members of the school cabinet, are monitoring the progress of individual students over time through discussion, conferencing, looking at students’ work and visiting classes. However, not all staff are familiar enough with the whole school goals to help focus their planning and instruction to a common end.

Teachers use ongoing assessments and conferencing notes to set measurable interim goals for their students’ achievement in English language arts and mathematics. Teachers in nearly all grades use regular collaborative team meetings to assess students’ work against relevant rubrics and this practice ensures consistency between the classes, as well as taking students’ learning forward from where they are, step by step. It also determines which students are working at which level, and which students need to be given extra support to help them achieve better. The school has the capacity to develop this feature so that it is consistent practice in all grades.

Data is used well to focus support on students who need most help to learn. Regular assessments help to track the progress of students new to the country, special education students and those close to moving up a level, to evaluate the effectiveness of academic interventions.

High expectations and future goals are shared with students by teachers in their classes. Through the use of clearly defined rubrics for grading their work, students are aware of what is expected of them and how to improve their work. The goals are not always shared in a way that parents understand. Parents know children’s goals because many use Princeton Review. However, many feel they have to catch teachers if they want additional information. They would like more information about the school’s goals and plans so they can help to improve their children’s performance and progress even more.

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 has curriculum pacing calendars that support curriculum planning effectively and ensure the mandated curriculum is securely in place. Close analysis of assessments help teachers to identify weaker areas in student knowledge and which skills they need to develop further. As a result, teachers are enabled to make adjustments to the curriculum to address these needs. Literacy and mathematics coaches work with grade teams to ensure the planned curriculum and subsequent instruction engage students’ interests and meet individual student’s learning needs in these subjects. As yet, science and social studies are not integrated into reading and writing subjects to give meaningful contexts for practicing and developing skills and to add more relevance to students’ learning.

The links between a close analysis of students' current performance and aligning instruction more accurately are focal points at weekly grade meetings. Data is used to organize groups in lessons to focus support, and plan extension and group conferencing activities. Teachers at some grade levels give thought to those students who are close to the performance level boundaries, and take steps to adjust the curriculum and their teaching. Working collaboratively, they identify what students need in order to move them on from where they are. The school gives effective support for those students at risk of falling behind. These students' needs are analyzed and action taken to adjust their programs of study. These interventions enable them to progress successfully towards grade level goals. However, this practice is not yet consistent in all grades.

Academic Intervention services support special education students well. Focused push-in support from a range of professional and paraprofessional staff, and from volunteers enables these students to make good progress. Where pull-out is deployed it is designed to supplement the student's work in class so that the full curriculum entitlement is not impaired. Students remain on task because of the frequent intervention and continuous support they receive. They have positive attitudes to their work and try hard to succeed.

Budget, scheduling and staffing decisions are based securely on data analysis. The new Smartboards and computer lab are used by many teachers as effective tools to engage students' interests and accelerate progress in a range of subjects.

Staff know students' personal needs very well and so offer clear guidance and counseling. Relationships are excellent. The principal's door is always open, ready and willing to listen to students' concerns at any time. Staff share information about students' personal and academic progress everyday, especially those at risk of or not reaching grade standards.

Teachers use a varied range of methods to engage and involve students in lessons. Students often work co-operatively in pairs, talking together to share and develop ideas. This creates a healthy 'buzz' in classrooms.

Attendance is monitored rigorously with home visits and telephone calls to follow up any unexplained absences.

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 some creative ideas for selecting staff. For example, a committee of teachers interviews prospective staff to look for personalities that will work as an effective member of their team as well as having the skills to use data to plan instruction. This strategy has resulted in a strong feeling of teamwork amongst staff. Leaders are selected on their abilities to evaluate, develop and revise plans to improve progress. The staff appointed make significant contributions to the school's success in their areas of expertise.

The principal is much respected by students and staff. She has a powerfully charismatic style and has rapidly driven the school forward to this point. Students are well-behaved, responsible and responsive members of their community. The school is now a safe place to be because of the time invested in ensuring students' well being. The school functions very well and any students requiring counseling for their behavior get a fair hearing from

the principal, the assistant principal and the 'children zone peacemakers'. Communication works well and so everyone is clear about the school's expectations.

Professional development is driven by a number of factors including needs revealed by student performance data, school goals, mandated curriculum changes and individual staff needs following formal and informal monitoring of teaching and learning. The principal is undoubtedly successful in empowering her staff to develop their expertise, and to put forward ideas with confidence. Opportunities for teachers to share good practice occur regularly. Test scores are now rising steadily because of relevant and worthwhile professional development for staff, resulting in improved instruction in classes especially in reading, writing and mathematics. Literacy and math coaches model lessons and monitor the impact and effectiveness of professional development training on students' learning. Ongoing professional development in how to analyze data is helping teachers to group and regroup students for specific teaching groups.

Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in grade teams during common preparation time, ensuring equality across classes in the same grade. However, there is not yet a full exchange of information between grades, nor are there formal opportunities for coaches to evaluate each other, although the school has the capacity to bring this about. This small school achieves some of these activities through informal staff discussions and conversations on a daily basis.

The principal and assistant principal regularly visit classes to monitor the quality of instruction. Detailed feedback identifies ongoing professional development needs and identifies aspects of instruction that need further improvement. The principal scrutinizes planning as she monitors the curriculum and instruction during her walk-throughs to ensure teachers are following the school's agreed procedures.

The school's numerous partnerships help it strive towards its goals through support for curriculum initiatives and help in classes.

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 school surveys the views of staff and parents when evaluating its practices each year and to inform its goals for the following year. However, the process for putting together the Comprehensive Education Plan still only involves members of the senior leadership team. Consequently, teachers are largely unaware of the praiseworthy goals embedded in the action plans and they are not clear about how the work they do in their classes relates directly to the school's declared goals. The plans contain clearly defined, challenging but reachable goals, although there is no calendar to show when these will be achieved, who is responsible for making sure action is implemented and what needs to be done next.

Comparisons of students' progress within and across classrooms are used very well in making interim diagnostic assessments and arranging remedial interventions. The school has detailed records which show the good practice in tracking students' progress across the school, the kind of intervention strategies that have been offered, and the resulting impact on students' progress and achievement. All information is discussed at regular team meetings to review programs and refine student goals in most classes and grades.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Gwendolyn Powell Brown Computer School (PS 242)	∅	✓	+
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

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