



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Maria Teresa Mirabal School**

**Middle School 319**

**21 Jumel Place  
Manhattan  
NY 10032**

**Principal: Ysidro Abreu**

**Dates of review: December 12 - 13, 2006**

**Reviewer: David Taylor**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Maria Teresa Mirabal School (MS 319) is a Title 1 middle school with students in grades 6 through 8. The current 8<sup>th</sup> graders will be the first to graduate to high school, since the school opened in its present form, sharing buildings with two other middle schools. It is located in the Washington Heights community of North Manhattan. There are 462 students enrolled, 28 of them special education students. There are 127 English language learners in the current year. The dominant ethnic group is Hispanic, with a small number of Black students and very few White, Asian or other students. The school is styled as a 'Math, Science and Technology school'. It has benefited from a major investment in technology, with Smartboards and linked laptops in every classroom, large numbers of laptops in everyday use in school, and participation in a scheme to allow students to have a desktop computer, with free broadband Internet connection for a year.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school has made remarkable progress in the two and a half years, transforming expectations and the regard of the community
- Imaginative and highly effective leadership is evident in all parts of the school
- The use of data is extensive, sensitive and linked closely to improving students' performance
- There is a clear commitment to teaching that encourages active learning and critical thinking, which is supported by stimulating visual displays around the school
- The teaching staff is fully involved in setting goals and developing curriculum and instruction; teachers are energetic, dedicated and often fanatical about the school and its students, using professional development to excellent effect
- The climate and practices of the school are strongly inclusive, embracing and valuing all individuals
- Very high levels of communication with parents, and support for and from them, are evident: parents' ringing endorsements reflect how well the school connects to its community
- Students behave with great respect and courtesy for each other and for teachers and other adults, and they express strong and warm appreciation of the wide-ranging enrichment and support activities
- There is an evident determination to raise each student's level of achievement which is increasingly being translated into effective practice, with many individual and notable successes
- The school provides excellent support to English language learners, whether in free-standing or monolingual classes, through the impressive efforts of staff who have learnt to plan for their success with an excellent spirit of collaboration.

### What the school needs to improve

- Fully translate its excellent systems and processes into consistently-achieved successful outcomes for all students
- Further development of formative assessment approaches within the classroom so that the sources of students' errors are diagnosed quickly and rapid remediation is ensured
- Find further ways to secure differentiation for students working at different levels, through varied lesson objectives, tasks and outcomes
- Continue to share best practice and to support less experienced teachers through regular exposure to excellent teaching models.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a well-developed school.**

The school has performed an exceptional task in two and a half years to move from the previous history of the building to becoming a school of distinction and choice within the neighbourhood. It has an excellent understanding of students' learning needs, particularly the large number of English language learners, for whom the specialist team of staff works particularly effectively, achieving notable results in raising the level of English acquisition for these students. Good teaching, backed by highly promising use of technology that includes Smartboards and laptops, together with students' use of computers at home, reflects the school's strong philosophy of education. The school is self-reflective and self-critical and there is constant review of curricula and materials to ensure sufficient challenge. Students express strong appreciation of this support as well as of the enrichment provided through extra-curricular activities.

#### **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 is thoroughly engaged in managing the copious data it collects and analyzes, which it uses in a large variety of ways to check on students' performance. It has strong systems in place for reviewing how students have done on public tests, but it has also put in place a number of processes for scrutinizing other forms of assessment, not least for its substantial population of English Language Learners. It has started to look at gender-based issues having identified that its numbers show a gender bias towards boys which it feels may be partly because of the named specialist areas of 'math, science and technology'. There is also particular attention paid to the small numbers who 'stagnate' or even go backwards in their scores. Teachers use the data they have gathered to plan for and create the unit tests for their faculty. They analyze the test questions to see exactly how each student did on particular items, and subsequent tests then include questions on topics in need of improvement.

There is good use of benchmarking data. The school has made careful comparisons with another school judged to be very effective and uses this comparison to set itself challenging targets. Arrangements are made to ensure that there is a detailed review of assessment data by faculty. For example, the school has programmed all mathematics classes for the seventh and eighth graders to take place at the same time each day. This enables the teachers of mathematics to have common teaching as well as common planning time. In addition, half of all of sixth grade mathematics classes and literacy classes take place at the same time to enhance the use of "clinic" approaches based on the use of data. In every department, study group time is programmed into teachers' schedules and this is utilized by all teachers to discuss best practices, evaluate student work and plan the next steps.

**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.**

The school has ambitious goals, based on clear common beliefs and a sense of shared purpose. The principal underscores the importance of an attractive and nurturing environment, and the walls and ceilings of classrooms and corridors reflect this with unusually dynamic and varied displays. The school believes that every child needs an individualized program that is tailored as precisely as possible to his or her needs. The principal feels that the school aims constantly to provide ‘laser intervention’ that goes straight to the heart of why individuals are not progressing as well as they should. The motto of ‘perseverance, achievement, excellence’ is plainly visible throughout the school and its work, and there is a clear commitment to developing students’ powers of critical thinking and reflection. Various techniques have been devised by the principal to ensure that staff share the school’s vision, notable among which has been the sustained reference to a book which examines what happens to students who ‘fall through the cracks’.

Teachers are fully involved in setting goals for students and for themselves. When they first receive students into their class they also acquire a list of strengths and areas of focus. Students and parents are regularly made aware of areas which are in need of improvement, and the school aims to adapt the instruction so that it is clearly guided by the data, which form the basis for creating intervention programs. Intervention programs include a morning advisory program which focuses on students’ organizational skills as well as on enhancing students’ prior knowledge. In addition, there are after school as well as Saturday academies for students to gain the necessary academic skills and strategies to prepare them for city and state exams. The school has developed an impressive capacity for self-evaluation on a regular basis and the principal states that it is ‘continually re-evaluating’ its goals. It is also refining its methods of recording details of where individual students are in their learning, with a color-coded system that was visible in many classrooms to give teachers and students a visual way to monitor progress.

**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.**

Faculty play a key role in developing the curriculum. Teachers are given time to meet together to develop the curriculum, and receive full information about student data. Meetings of the cabinet discuss the focus for the week in both literacy and mathematics.

The school gives teachers scope to plan curricula to meet their students’ needs with, for example, the science curriculum aiming to produce a step-by-step program to support the expansion of practical science. The school makes a particular effort to give parents a sound understanding of what their children are learning. A syllabus summary is sent to all parents bi-monthly, and parents say they find this very helpful. Planning is very thorough and the ‘agenda’ for each lesson is clearly displayed. Some less experienced teachers are proficient and highly conscientious at devising plans, but do not always succeed in ensuring that the proposed timings work out, or that there is sufficient differentiation.

The principal and cabinet take financial, staffing and scheduling decisions in a responsible and prudent way, ensuring that resources are directed to the school's priorities. The investment in computing technology, as part of a pilot initiative, has made a significant difference to teaching and to students' learning. Students take an active part in their lessons, responding in a positive manner to the range of activities that teachers plan them. Cooperation seems to come naturally and behavior is good. Students are acquiring good learning habits and their oral contributions, although often not matched yet in their writing, show clear signs of improvement. Students regard the school as 'really great' and teachers are described as 'fun and fair'. Relationships throughout the school are excellent, and parents see the teachers as exceptionally supportive, always having time for their children and knowing how to deal with any problems they might have.

The school focuses very rigorously on attendance, and figures for this term have shown an impressive rise to over 96% for a week at the start of December. Parents are impressed by the way the school gets on the case of absences, seeing that as typical of the excellent communications it receives about all aspects of their children's life – not least through the Thursday letter which they receive each week.

**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 school emphasises strongly that professional development is a continuous process, not occurring only in courses away from school. The principal arranged for a major developmental program in the summer with all of the administration and faculty selecting from a list of topics relevant to the school's stage of development, including data analysis, teachers selected according to their need. Staff development needs are color coded on a four point scale, to show strengths and areas for development. Principal and assistant principals conduct formal observations, and walk-throughs. Individual teachers meet with the principal to discuss their strengths and areas of improvement. Teachers are becoming very familiar with the idea of observing each other, seeing it as part of their professional development. Coaches are strongly involved and give much helpful feedback.

The bilingual teachers meet together regularly to discuss the progress of individual students and discovered, for example, that some students had concealed linguistic difficulties with specialist vocabulary that were impeding their progress. One teacher commented that this was the first school she had worked in which really does use data to drive instruction, where everyone feels a sense of responsibility for each other and where everyone knows each other's deficiencies and strengths.

The principal's leadership is highly regarded. He is seen as someone who listens and takes issues forward. He has an 'excellent understanding of instruction' and has won the trust of the parents and students. Parents note that when they visit the school everybody is studying hard in a tranquil atmosphere, and this was evident during the review. They also recognise that children are making great progress, particularly in English. They are very proud of school and take an active part in it. Teachers are very highly regarded by students and parents, who find them helpful and supportive. They like the range of enrichment and extra-curricular activity that is offered. The school has effective partnerships. It is well-established in its community, and is becoming a school which attracts parents.

**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 is one which engages very fully with evaluation of its achievements. Staff are well-versed in looking in detail at the implications of reviews for their own practice. They make excellent use of common preparation periods and faculty meetings to adjust and respond. They are aware that the challenge of linking instruction closely to individual students' need is a continuing one. They use interim reviews to revise goals where necessary, and make proficient use of comparative data, although this is an area for further development. The staff teams show considerable resourcefulness and resilience in responding to data and considering the implication for their work.

The school has a deep understanding of why refining the use of data in ways which really make a difference to educational quality is such a key strand in policy. This is because the evidence it receives from the data is that the children it seeks to serve are those for whom expectations and achievement need particularly to be raised. It is closely attuned to the local community in combining high aspirations with a belief that the successful grasp of educational opportunity is the key to success for its students. There is therefore a potent combination of passionate commitment from the school's leaders and a wholehearted embrace of the guiding principles of the school from a staff who, while often still relatively inexperienced, lack nothing in dedication and determination. The speed with which such a high degree of success has been achieved is impressive; but this is a school which, while possessing fully-developed systems and many examples of excellent practice, knows it has still further progress to make. The principal lays great store on the sustainability of what is now in place, and the firm and deep roots which have been put down are strong evidence of the capacity for continued success.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Maria Teresa Mirabal School [MS 319]</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>

\* 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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X