



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**The Neighborhood School**

**Public School 363**

**121 East 3 Street  
New York  
NY 10009**

**Principal: Judith Foster**

**Dates of review: February 15 – 16, 2007**

**Reviewer: Dee Wheatley**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Neighborhood School, Public School 363, is a pre-kindergarten to grade 5 school located in Greenwich Village, New York. It has 263 students enrolled and is smaller than most City schools. The student population is ethnically diverse with Hispanic (28%), Black (22%) and White (31%) being the major groups represented. A further 15% of the students have an Asian heritage and a few are from American Indian families. Only six students are currently at an early stage in learning English which is much lower than is found in City schools. As a 'school of choice', the school is able to select students, doing so through an annual lottery and an emphasis on maintaining a balance in ethnic and cultural diversity. Just under a quarter of the population are special education students. The stability of the student body is higher than is found in City schools. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding. Attendance, at 93%, is above the average for City schools.

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 leadership of the principal is strong and she is ably supported by the coaches for mathematics and literacy.
- The curriculum is broad and varied, in line with the school's philosophy and is considerably enriched by educational visits and extra-curricular experiences.
- The focus on learning from first-hand experience and research develop the students' thinking and speaking skills well, although there could be more consistent challenge for higher achievers.
- The school climate is characterized by good collegiality amongst staff and warm relationships throughout.
- The students behave well and are confident and buoyant learners.
- The parents value the school's approach and are pleased by the education it provides for their children.
- Good resources, particularly the excellent school library, enhance the learning.
- The school is well organized and managed.

### What the school needs to improve

- Improve the quality of extended writing throughout the school.
- Ensure there is consistent challenge and pace in the work provided for higher achievers.
- Further develop the use of achievement data to set targets for all students, using them to provide realistic and challenging whole-school goals, and increase the focus on ethnicity and gender.
- Sharpen the lesson monitoring to ensure that weaknesses are picked up, and acted on, in good time.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

The school has a central philosophy of providing enquiry-based learning around core social studies themes. This approach is developing the students' thinking skills and, by and large, encouraging a good level of engagement and 'ownership' of work by the students. While differentiation of learning is good in many respects, occasionally there is not enough challenge in the work for higher achievers. The curriculum is broad and enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular experiences which the students enjoy. The behavior of the students is very good. The school is well led by the principal and relationships are positive throughout. The parents are very supportive. Performance data, including that being generated as part of the periodic assessments, are used well to assess student progress and identify next steps in learning. The process is leading to improvements in standards, particularly in reading and mathematics. Progress in writing is not as strong and the use of data in setting longer term goals for student performance is underdeveloped. The school's self evaluation is satisfactory in that strengths and weaknesses are recognized but it lacks some sharpness.

### 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.**

Designing its own assessments as part of its 'Empowerment School' designation enabled the school to complement its already 'customized' curriculum and it has grasped the opportunity with enthusiasm. It has used it to build on the personalized assessments which are already part of the way it tracks and reports learning, for example, in detailed narrative reports which are provided for parents. Running records, including the developmental reading assessment, the early years' assessments, regular conferencing with students and periodic assessments in the upper grades, are drawn on appropriately to track progress, and adjust the teaching to meet needs. The assessments are used to determine guided reading groups, for example. As part of a local network of schools, the staff have designed materials which enable ongoing assessment of progress. In mathematics, the school is piloting continuous assessment in 1st and 2nd grades, whereby students are assessed against developmental descriptors in early addition and subtraction. It is also drawing on research to pilot a mathematics program ('Measure Up Math') during the extended day with a small number of students in grade 2. This is still in the preparation stage.

There is good focus on individual students, and within that, effective attention to key groups, for example English language learners and special education students. Overall, considerable effective work is being done to analyze achievement and identify next steps in learning for the students. However, there is not yet sufficient focus on the 'big picture' and on the longer term view, apart from in reading, of the levels the students should reach by the next year. Further, while there is some analysis of performance on the basis of

gender, ethnicity and similar schools, there is a lack of rigor and consistency in examining patterns and trends.

**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 school has already moved some way, particularly in mathematics, to set goals for individual students identified as next steps in learning. The information is used appropriately, by and large, to group students by ability for some class work and to enable the work to be differentiated to match learning needs. The focus on next steps is leading to improvement and, for example, ensures good response to the needs of students requiring extra support or intervention, including special education students and the small number of students at an early stage in learning English. However, while an advanced readers group has been identified, the school could do more to recognize and challenge its higher achievers throughout.

As indicated above, the school is not looking sufficiently at the ‘bigger picture’ and identifying the progress of which the students are capable beyond the immediate next steps in learning. Hence, there is not a clear set of targets, based on prior achievement data for each student and informed by teacher assessment, to indicate the overall progress expected for the class and grade in the next academic year.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is a substantial document which includes key development priorities with accompanying goals. The goals for academic performance are somewhat notional, however, in that they are not fully founded in information about the expected progress of the students in each grade. Hence, in reviewing performance year to year the school is not able to say, with sufficient clarity, whether the results are in line with, less or better than could be expected given the students’ starting points. For example, the 2006 results in City and State tests show a fall on the previous year and fluctuations across grades, and the school is not wholly clear as to whether they are as good as could have been expected given the students’ prior achievement.

There is substantial gathering of survey data from key stakeholders, including parents, staff and students which are used effectively to gain feedback and inform future planning. Very good two-way communication is maintained with parents, who are aware of the high expectations of the school. Parental feedback indicates a high level of satisfaction with the school and a positive commitment to its goals.

**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 strong. The school’s commitment to providing enquiry-based learning means that much of the curriculum is organized around core social studies themes or foci, such as the local community. The foci provide a good vehicle for teaching the basic skills, although these are also taught in separate lessons. Opportunities to apply and transfer

learning are taken, for example by integrating mathematics and science teaching. In addition to the core areas, the curriculum also includes programs in computer technology, music, art, dance, drama and physical education. Effective opportunities to learn through first hand experience are provided via a rich range of educational visits linked to the themes being studied. In addition, the school has good resources, including an excellent library, which is being used well by teachers to support the emphasis on independent reading and leading to good progress as a result. A strength of the enquiry based approach is the independence it has generated in the students, the majority of whom are confident and enthusiastic learners. They sustain concentration when discussing issues in groups and engage readily in tackling quite challenging questions. This was the case in regard to group work in a grade 4/5 class where the students synthesized knowledge on Mesopotamia well to tackle discursive questions.

The school has mixed grade classes, an arrangement which is popular with teachers who value the social interaction and responsibility it engenders in the students. Teachers are aware of their responsibilities for the progress that their students make. The school is very conscious of the implications for class grouping strategies and differentiating instruction to match learning needs. By and large, teachers use assessment data well to tailor the instruction to needs, although occasionally whole class teaching is not sufficiently challenging for higher achievers. In mathematics, a key strength is the way that the students are being taught mathematical reasoning and flexible use of strategies to tackle problems. In writing, the progress is not consistent throughout the school. This is mainly because, with some exceptions, the expectations for volume and quality are not high enough. In some lower grade classes there is too little guided practice using fine motor skills and in upper grades there is insufficient volume and quality in extended writing.

Staffing, budgeting and scheduling arrangements work well in supporting the identified needs of the students. The principal has also been successful in acquiring several grants to augment and enrich the academic program through, for example, extra music instruction, overnight field trips, and additional resources for the library. Monies are also used well to provide extra support for learning such as push-in support for English language learners who are reasonably fluent in English but nonetheless require some help with more challenging work.

The school climate is strong. Relationships between students and teachers are very warm. The students feel safe, secure and well supported. They are comfortable about approaching adults in time of need and the survey information shows that the majority like school. The school puts a high priority on attendance and there is rigorous follow up of any absence.

**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 rigorous procedures for hiring staff, including appropriate attention to the use of assessment data. There is also a strong and systematic focus on professional development of staff. The expertise of the mathematics and literacy coaches is very good and results in high quality support for teachers. A good example of this is the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the 'Everyday Mathematics' program by the mathematics coach. This information is being used effectively to strengthen teaching and assessment practices so that the teachers can deepen the students' learning of mathematical concepts

more successfully. In-house professional development is also facilitated through well-established links with Columbia University Teachers' College coaches. In addition, grade teams meet twice a week, one of these being with the school coaches, to discuss data and plan lessons. These meetings provide valuable opportunities to evaluate and share practice.

The teachers' commitment is strong, as reflected by the very detailed narrative reports that they write for parents, for example. Teachers value the opportunities to develop their skills and particularly appreciate the opportunity to visit each other's classrooms. The teachers receive good feedback from the school coaches who observe aspects of instruction. The principal also monitors through regular 'walkthroughs' of classes and through formal observations of teachers as part of the performance review process. Where teaching is not as effective as it should be, improvement goals are set and appropriate support provided.

The school is well organized and managed. The principal is highly regarded by staff and parents alike. One of her strengths is that she has made the school very welcoming for parents, valuing their input as essential to the successful education of the students. The strong links with community organizations add considerable enrichment to the curriculum programs and hence contribute well to the students' learning and progress.

**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 has a systematic process for reviewing the goals and implementation plans in the Comprehensive Education Plan. It has substantial means of assessing achievement and progress. In addition to the data analysis, the school also scrutinizes the students' work to ensure a shared view of strengths and issues to be addressed. Although the work on designing its own assessments is still at a relatively early stage of development, the school is making steady progress in building on the good practice already in place. Assessments for individuals, in all classes and grades, are not only carried out on an interim basis, there is considerable ongoing assessment. The principal regularly gathers qualitative data from parents, teachers and students and uses the information, alongside performance data, to inform strategic decisions.

Meetings are used effectively to share information and discuss strategies for improving learning in mainstream classes and through intervention programs, for example in reading in the lower grades. Goals and plans are monitored and adjusted as required to improve learning, for the most part. Systems lack some rigor, however, as the weaknesses in writing were not identified as quickly as they could have been. The school, rightly, now has plans to make writing an improvement priority.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The Neighborhood School (PS 363)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<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>			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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<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.	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<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	