The New York City Department of Education

Quality Review Report

The Jean Paul Richter School

Public School 081

559 Cypress Avenue
Queens
NY 11385

Principal: Frank Candella

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Reviewer: Chip Morrison

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Information about the school

Public School 81, The Jean Paul Richter School, is a kindergarten through grade five school located in the Glendale neighborhood of Queens. The school currently serves more than 1200 students, of whom approximately 83% are Hispanic, 9% are from Asian and other backgrounds, 6% are White and 2% are Black. About 9% are identified as special education students (twice as many as the previous year) and more than 20% as English language learners. Fully 100% of students are registered as Title I eligible, well above the average for similar schools and the City as a whole. Average daily attendance over the past three years has been consistent at around 94%, slightly above the average for similar schools (93%) and equivalent to the average for City schools with students at these grade levels.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has helped increasing numbers of students meet or exceed State standards, especially in mathematics and with special education students and English language learners.
- The principal is an experienced, resourceful leader who has helped the school make substantial improvements over his long tenure at the school.
- The school benefits from a highly collaborative, experienced leadership team.
- Teachers and school leaders have begun to use student performance data to meet student needs better, especially in reading.
- There is a consistent approach to instruction, especially in literacy and mathematics, and good alignment of curriculum and assessment with State standards.
- Teachers collaborate well, enjoy working at the school, and feel a strong sense of friendly support from instructional leaders and colleagues.
- Students are well behaved, fully acquainted with classroom routines, attentive, focused on successful learning, and appreciative of their teachers.
- The school focuses on the needs of struggling students, and has paid special attention to special Education students and English language learners.
- Teachers and instructional leaders demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement, openness to change, and willingness to learn.

What the school needs to improve

- Help teachers find ways to summarize diagnostic assessment information on individual students so as to provide a detailed picture of the changing needs and progress of each class.
- Develop ways of aggregating data from interim and classroom assessments so as to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of different classes, grade levels, and the school as a whole.
- Develop systems to set and monitor progress toward specific, challenging, measurable, interim goals for classroom groups and the school as a whole.
- Create a system for analyzing student writing that provides useful feedback to students while at the same time generating data on student writing skills in different genres by classroom, grade level, and the school as a whole.
- Establish a system for capturing quantitative data from school walk-throughs to provide a regularly updated profile of school-wide instructional practices.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Public School 81 provides a warm, nurturing environment for students and teachers alike. Parents speak highly of the personal attention that teachers give to students. Students appreciate the help they receive from staff, and teachers themselves welcome the support they receive from instructional leaders and colleagues. Most importantly, over the past five years, the school has made significant progress in aligning curriculum and instruction with State standards, thereby helping to increase the numbers of students who meet or exceed expectations. Progress has been especially strong in mathematics. The school has also been recognized by the City as having done a particularly good job in meeting the needs of English language learners and special education students. The school has also made important strides in the use of assessment data to identify student needs and differentiate instruction to meet these needs. Beginning in the current academic year, teachers have been required to maintain assessment binders with copious conferencing notes, standardized test scores, and the results of unit tests. They use this information to understand better the needs of students and tailor instruction to their needs through the use of small groups and other means. However, the school is only beginning to aggregate this data on individual students to create a regularly updated profile of the needs of students (and teachers) for classes as a whole, for grade levels, subject areas, and other categories of interest. As a result, instructional leaders do not yet have the tools to manage instructional quality effectively, target the needs of teachers and groups of students, or to use interim benchmarks to monitor progress toward annual goals.

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 gathers a copious amount of data on the academic performance and progress of individual students. In addition to annual State-mandated tests in core subject areas, the school has access to a range of regular interim assessments in mathematics and reading that it uses to understand student needs generally, and especially to identify students at risk of academic failure in these subjects. In addition, classroom teachers maintain a large quantity of data on individual students in their assessment binders. Some teachers summarize this data in a way that allows them to see the larger picture of student needs in their classrooms. However, this is not a consistent practice. Instructional leaders are only now beginning to find ways of aggregating important classroom data (such as the results of unit tests) in a way that would allow them to get a detailed, evolving, skill-level picture of student needs and strengths by classroom, grade level, and subject area.

Instructional leaders use data from the annual State-mandated tests to monitor the progress of ethnic groups, English language learners, and special needs students. Using this data, for example, they have identified pressing needs among the latter two groups, and have attempted to meet these needs through the provision of additional collaborative team teaching (CTT) classrooms for special education students, and self-contained ESL classrooms for language learners.

The school also monitors students in other categories of special interest; for example, one of the assistant principals has looked at the impact of 'looping' on student learning by comparing the performance of students who have had the same teacher for one or more years to those who have not. This said, the gathering of data to answer specific questions is not yet a common practice in the school.

Instructional leaders use annual assessment data to make useful comparisons with other schools, and comparisons across subject areas, ethnic groups, and grade levels. However, they are only beginning to use data from interim assessments and classroom assessments to evaluate the impact of changes to instructional programs, make changes as necessary, or make useful comparisons across classrooms.

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.

Instructional leaders, working with the school leadership team, set incremental goals for annual progress at school level as part of the Comprehensive Education Plan process. Also, individual classroom teachers set goals for the progress of individual students based on State standards, and leaders are beginning to work with classroom teachers to set formal interim goals for mastery of specific sub-skills. For example, knowing that students must be at a certain reading level by the end of the year, they set measurable interim goals based on the progress students must make to meet the year-end goal. The setting of specific, measurable interim goals for progress is not yet consistent across subject areas, and the annual incremental goals are not firmly enough based on the analysis of actual needs.

The school pays particular attention to the needs of struggling students through a combination of push-in and pull-out academic services, small-group and individual tutoring, an after-school program and a Saturday academy. Knowing that the majority of students come from non-English-speaking homes (and many initially come to school barely able to speak the language), the school pays special to the needs of English language learners, providing self-contained English as a second language (ESL) classrooms at every grade level. Performance on the State assessment for English language learners is used as a measure of the success of these programs and services.

The principal has made a special effort to engage parents in the life of the school by inviting them to take part in annual performances and displays of student work, as a way of helping them understand what is expected. Parents express appreciation for the fact that teachers are open to meet with them at anytime, and some teachers have begun to conduct e-mail correspondence with parents to clarify expectations. While some parents have reported a lack of consistency in expectations for homework from one classroom to the next, the sample was too small to note this as a general pattern.

Teachers and instructional leaders focus their efforts in helping all students make progress on mastering tested concepts and skills. Students are also aware of the high expectations that are held out for them, and appreciate their teachers' support in helping them meet these expectations.

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.

In recent years, the school has made significant progress in aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment with State standards. Goals for mastery of specific sub-skills in reading, writing, and mathematics have been shared with teachers. Instructional leaders have begun to monitor progress toward these goals, especially in reading and, to a lesser extent, in mathematics. There is an emphasis on writing across the curriculum, and, while not yet used systematically to gather data on student writing skills, rubrics are available for evaluating student writing. A workshop-style instructional model is has been established schoolwide. Teachers use assessment information to decide on the focus for their conferencing and work with small groups.

Teachers are held accountable for helping students master targeted skills on schedule, as evidenced, to some degree, in their assessment binders. Instructional leaders conduct regular grade-level meetings to review student progress, plan instruction, and share problems and successes. Instruction is differentiated to the needs of students in a variety of ways, including flexible student grouping, customization of tasks, and push-in support from paraprofessionals and others. There is also an emphasis on tracking student reading levels, and ensuring that they read books at their independent reading level.

With useful assistance from one of the assistant principals, the principal has managed the budget, schedule, and staffing in ways that tend to improve student outcomes. For example, as noted above, to meet the needs of English language learners, self-contained ESL classes and CTT classes have been provided at each grade level. Four mathematics coaches have been hired, academic intervention services staff have been assigned to each grade, and funding has been obtained to reduce class size.

Classroom observations reveal consistently high levels of student engagement. Students clearly enjoy their classes and are focused on learning. Students report appreciation for the work their teachers do to help them learn, especially when they are struggling. Some students feel that the work could be more challenging, a feeling that is shared by some parents.

The school benefits from the work of academic intervention teachers, counselors, family workers, and other specialists who work together as a team to identify and meet the complicated needs of students at risk of failing to meet year-end goals. A large (20-member) team meets weekly on matters of policy and strategy. Smaller, grade-level teams handle small caseloads of individual students. Students know and trust adults and feel comfortable about approaching them in time of need. Also, as a result of careful monitoring, combined with successful efforts to ensure that students enjoy coming to school, attendance is not a problem. Prolonged absences receive immediate attention. The school is still working to address chronic tardiness among certain students.

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 proficient.

School leaders have been successful in hiring and retaining a committed group of teachers who care about children and share the school's vision for academic excellence. Teachers

are hired for their commitment to children, demonstrated effectiveness, and willingness to learn. These qualities are valued beyond specific skills, such as data analysis, which the school feels can be taught on the job. In fact, the school emphasizes in-house professional development. Literacy and mathematics coaches work with both new and experienced teachers to help them hone their skills. Teachers help to identify professional development needs. New faculty members praise the level of support they have received from mentors.

The principal and assistant principals are in classrooms daily and arrange for teachers to visit each other's classrooms on a regular basis. Instructional leaders also conduct regular walkthroughs, looking for specific practices. After each walkthrough the principal composes a letter for the staff, summarizing the team's findings. This has helped with consistency of instruction. Grade-level teams meet regularly to review the results of interim assessments and share problems and successes. There is a high level of collaboration and informal sharing. Teachers know each other well and work effectively in teams.

The principal is well-liked and respected. Over his long tenure at the school, and especially over the past six years, working with the America's Choice model, he has overseen improvements in curriculum and instruction that have led to better alignment with State standards and consequent gains in student learning.

Students are taught expectations for behavior and academic performance in kindergarten, and these are reinforced consistently at every grade level, in every classroom. As a result, the school runs smoothly. Children are consistently respectful of their teachers and of each other. Transitions between classes are smooth and well-organized.

The school has been successful in aligning support services with academic goals. The academic intervention team has been successful at working with struggling students, as evidenced by the declining number of students at the lower performance levels. Partnerships with organizations such as the Greater Ridgewood Youth Council provide additional opportunities for enrichment and engagement.

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 undeveloped.

The cabinet monitors progress toward targets defined in the Comprehensive Education Plan on an annual basis, gathering at the end of the year to review progress and set goals for the coming year. Teachers regularly monitor the progress of individual students toward mastery of grade-level expectations, particularly in reading and mathematics. However, as interim goals are insufficiently articulated, interim progress is hard to track. Through walk-throughs and formal observations, the principal and assistant principals monitor progress in different classrooms and use interim assessment data, especially in reading and mathematics, to make comparisons across classrooms. However, in the absence of more consistent methods of reporting the results of classroom assessments, leaders have limited ability to make useful comparisons across classrooms and grade levels, or to monitor progress toward interim goals for all core subject areas. This, in turn, makes it difficult to adjust plans and target professional development more closely to meet emerging needs.

Leaders are aware of the need for more systematic use of performance data to drive continuing improvements, and are committed to building out these systems consistently, based on models that are already largely available in the school.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: John Paul Richter (PS 81)	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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: • 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: • 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: • 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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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 knows and respect students and responds 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.	**Ø**	**✓**	**+**
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.	**Ø**	**✓**	**+**
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		