



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**The Seneca School**

**Public School 088**

**60-85 Catalpa Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11385**

**Principal: Linda China**

**Dates of review: May 1 - 3, 2007**

**Reviewer: Frank Knowles**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Seneca School is a large elementary school with nearly 1100 students enrolled from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. Student numbers have stabilized at this figure, reducing from a high of about 1800 enrolled students in 2003 when the school was over-utilized. The removal of temporary accommodation means that the school's utilization of its building is still just over 100%, with four classes of kindergarten students housed in an annex three quarters of a mile away.

Approximately 53% of students are Hispanic, 39% are White, 2% are Black and 6% come from Asian or other backgrounds. The percentage of English language learners is 16%, close to the City average, and the main languages spoken are Spanish, Polish and Chinese. However, many other students come from homes where the predominant language is not English. The school receives Title 1 funding for all its students, which is above average for similar and City schools. Attendance, at 92%, is just below the City average and below the average for similar schools.

The school has a wide range of special education programs for the 23% of students who are eligible. As well as two self-contained classes and eight classes which have mainstreamed students from District 75, special education students are found in thirteen classes which use collaborative team teaching. In addition, the school has specialist input from speech services, occupational therapy, physical therapy and adaptive physical education. A further 18% of students receive academic intervention services.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school uses data well to gain a view of the performance and progress of individual students, classes and grades.
- The school's programs for special education students are extensive and instruction is aligned well to their needs.
- The school's mission to educate the whole child is successful in creating a caring and supportive school for all its students.
- Students' programs are enriched well through its extended day programs and its involvement with arts organizations.
- The principal is very well respected by the students, parents and staff and has good capacity to lead the school in further improvement.
- Staff have a strong and shared commitment to contributing fully to the school's improvement.
- Teachers' collaborative work in planning and using data to identify the next steps in learning is successful in differentiating instruction to match students' needs
- Professional development focuses strongly on issues identified by the school's analysis of data.
- Very good communication with teachers, parents and students means that the school runs very smoothly.
- Academic intervention services, special education services and services for English language learners are carefully deployed according to students' needs

### What the school needs to improve

- Extend the analysis and interpretation of assessment data to include gender and ethnic background to ensure any differences in performance are identified quickly.
- Introduce measures of progress in mathematics for kindergarten through grade 2 to complement those in English language arts so that the progress of individual students can be more accurately determined.
- Focus attention in self-evaluation on the impact that changes in programs are having, using interim and final outcomes as evidence of improved achievement.
- Communicate the breadth of the school's mission more clearly to students so that they share fully the school's enthusiasm that they should reach their goals.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

The school fulfils its mission to provide an education for the whole child. It has done this through building strong relationships among staff and with parents and providing a secure and caring school for all. The school is highly inclusive, enrolling a wide range of special education students, aligning the curriculum to their needs and maintaining high expectations for all its students. Students show great respect for each other and listen to each other's views well. They engage well in class and make good use of the opportunities provided through the school's extended day and its arts programs. This comes about through the very good leadership of the principal and the effective way she involves staff in the development of the school.

Teachers are fully involved in the interpretation of assessment data and there are very effective collaborative approaches to planning instruction and to monitoring the progress of individual students, classes and grades. Assessment data is used well to align instruction to the needs of individual students. As a result, the school has seen a steady increase in students' achievement in recent years. The absence of some data analysis means that teachers' knowledge of the relative performance of boys, girls and students in different ethnic groups is not clear. In mathematics, in kindergarten through grade 2, teachers rely heavily on informal assessments in the absence of data about students' progress. The school's Comprehensive Education Plan is a working document, with regular reviews on how well the school is meeting its goals. Reviews of progress towards these goals take place, but focus too much on improvements in practice rather than improvements in students' achievement. The principal is very well respected and has a secure knowledge of the school and the next steps to improvement.

### 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 makes use of a range of data from State and City tests to gain a clear understanding of students' performance each year, to understand trends in performance and how the school compares with similar schools. The school also uses its own assessments to determine the progress of individual students in reading, writing and mathematics, although in mathematics data is only available for grades 3 through 5. Teachers make frequent use this data, as well as detailed individual conferencing record sheets, to understand students' achievement in considerable depth and to set out the next steps in their learning. As a result, the school has a very good understanding of the performance and progress of individual students, particularly special education students.

Teachers are skilled in analyzing test data from different strands of the curriculum in each grade to determine which specific aspects need to be improved. Data are also analyzed to identify differences in the performance of different groups of students, such as classes,

English language learners, those receiving academic intervention services and those in collaborative team teaching classes. Teachers use these analyses to make suitable modifications to students' programs, for the whole grade or for groups within a class or grade. However, this analysis does not include comparing the performance of boys and girls or of ethnic groups. This means the school is not in a position to identify differences and make any modifications to programs or instruction for these groups.

**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.**

Making use of the school's data, staff work collaboratively to set the annual goals for improvement set out in the Comprehensive Education Plan and to develop more detailed plans to reach them. These are clear, measurable and drive the work of the teams of teachers well at each grade. Reading, writing and mathematics conferences are used to communicate individual goals to students and assessment data is used to keep track of their progress. Teachers identify any students at risk of not achieving their goals and put in place additional support where it is needed. As a result, students' achievement has risen. In kindergarten through grade 2, however, the absence of any assessments in mathematics to match those in English language arts means that teachers rely heavily on conference records and informal classroom assessment, increasing the likelihood of students slipping through the net.

The school is particularly good at tracking the progress of English language learners, special education students and others receiving additional support, modifying their programs confidently to help them to achieve as highly as they can. Individual education plans are well used to record their specific goals. Staff set challenging goals for students, and these are communicated to students during conferences and to parents through yearly meetings and information sheets. Parents are familiar with their children's goals and what they can do to help them achieve them. Teachers use telephone calls to commend students to their parents or to communicate changes to 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 school's mission to educate the whole child means that it places considerable emphasis on students' personal development alongside their work on the mandated academic programs. The curriculum is modified annually to take account of students' performance in different aspects, for example with additional reading classes and additions to the mathematics curriculum where data analysis has identified areas that need improving. Scheduling is changed from year to year to match the curriculum. These changes are linked to decisions about the budget and staffing resources to be used.

Teachers work very well collaboratively to plan instruction and make use of assessment data to shape the mandated programs to the needs of different classes and, within classes, individual students and groups with different specific needs. Teachers fully

involve the school's paraprofessionals and those that provide additional services, and they take account of the next steps identified through conferencing and, for those students who have them, the goals in individual education plans. As a result, instruction is very well matched to students' needs. Academic intervention services, 'push-in' and 'pull-out' support, and other services are used flexibly to provide the right support when and where it is needed. Teachers feel fully accountable for the instruction in their classes.

Students are positive about the instruction they receive and value the school for the support it gives them for their social development. However, they recognize the importance of academic work to their future well-being. They behave well and respond enthusiastically in class to teachers' questions, always giving extended and well reasoned answers and listening to each other's responses respectfully. Students respond well, too, to opportunities they get for paired and practical work and older students are able to critique each other's work sensitively and accurately. They particularly enjoy the enrichment activities provided in the arts and the extended day. Nevertheless, many students are compliant rather than excited by their learning.

Students' near average attendance for the City means that the school has not had to focus strongly on improvement in this area, although it sees good attendance as important. It has a range of policies to ensure that long-term absence is checked and followed up, and these are effective.

**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 has a team of committed teachers and other staff, who want to bring about improvement and who work together very well in using assessment data and in discussing the curriculum and instruction. The principal sets out clear direction for staff and has provided time in the schedule for common planning and review sessions. These work very effectively, making use of very strong professional relationships to share ideas for improvement, particularly at each grade level when planning and reviewing students' progress. However, when reviewing how successful changes have been, not enough attention is given to evaluating the impact of the changes on students' achievement.

The principal is highly respected by staff, parents and students. Her excellent interpersonal skills mean she is able to get the best out of staff, empowering them to make changes but ensuring that proposed changes are well supported by data analysis and the needs of the students. She has a good understanding of the quality of instruction in the school. The principal and the assistant principals carry out an extensive program of formal observations and walkthroughs, giving clear feedback to staff on what is successful and what can be improved. Good use is made of coaches to support staff where needed. In addition, teachers frequently visit each other's classes to share practice and improve consistency of instruction or learn new ideas. This intervisitation stems directly from the full discussions held in grade teams and through the involvement of the coaches.

Recruitment of staff is based on secure criteria focusing on their motivation and commitment to children's education, their experience and their knowledge of the curriculum and its assessment. As a result, almost all the school's teachers are highly qualified. Professional development is driven by the work of the grade teams and the areas for development identified through data analysis, and many teachers are currently

engaged in significant development programs. All teachers have been trained in analyzing data and they are confident in interpreting and comparing assessment results. As a result, data analysis drives the work of the cabinet, coaches and grade teams alike.

The school makes extensive use of a range of specialist services and has integrated these fully into the school's programs and aligned them well to the needs of students. The use of assessment data to identify those students who are eligible is very strong. Communication and scheduling are very clear and, as a result, the school runs very smoothly.

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

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school's Comprehensive Education Plan is a working document setting out agreed goals for the year and it is used regularly by the cabinet to check on progress. Constructed annually after reviews by staff teams, it has clear indicators of success by which to measure progress. These are used by grade teams and faculties as they monitor progress towards their goals. Changes are made to goals for groups of students as needed.

The progress of individual students is frequently assessed, and interim and final assessment data are used very effectively to identify where revisions of plans are needed to ensure students, or groups of students, meet their goals and to plan support and interventions where they are needed. The progress of different groups is regularly discussed at grade team meetings and the cabinet and action taken where needed to re-plan. The coaches for English language arts and mathematics have a particularly strong input where the data suggests that modifications are needed to these programs. Working with grade teams, they revise plans to include modified goals, mainly on a yearly basis.

The collaborative goal setting that takes place annually and when changes are needed is securely based on reviews of current practices. The review sections of the plans, however, pay more attention to the quality of the actions taken than they do to the impact of those actions on students' achievement.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The Seneca School (PS 088)</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	