



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Joyce Keld Briarwood School

Public School 117

**85 - 15 143rd Street
Queens
NY 11435**

Principal: Harvey Katz

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Reviewer: Mary Ayala

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 117 has a current enrollment of 1,082 students. As a neighborhood school, changing demographics have resulted in a decline of almost 200 students since 2003. The school's cultural diversity reflects this changing demographic with populations of Black and White students at 15% and 16% respectively and populations of Hispanic, Asian and others at 29% and 39% respectively. Most recently arrived students from Colombia, India and Pakistan contribute to the school's ever-increasing number of English language learners, currently 14% of the student body. There are only 6% special education students. Attendance, at over 93%, is above that of similar and City-wide schools.

The school has sustained arts enrichment opportunities through an interdisciplinary curriculum and through funding raised by the parent teacher association. Each year a major music theater production is a highlight for both the school and its wider community.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and assistant principals work effectively together to secure academic rigor and high performance for the school.
- The administrative team has established a culture of trust and collaboration that promotes continuous conversations about improving student performance.
- Staff use a variety of sources of data well to assess student progress, discuss the data in a variety of forums and use the information to continuously modify classroom instruction.
- Staff view their colleagues as resident experts and continuously share best practices and ask for assistance.
- A very active parent teacher association enables parents to participate in events and to support the work of the school.
- Student progress is monitored very well using a wide range of methods.
- The school's rich cultural diversity is celebrated and integrated into the curriculum.
- Professional development is on going, primarily site-based, and aligned with identified needs.

What the school needs to improve

- Organize data to review individual student progress over time, and use this to analyze the performance of sub-groups, and to compare the school's performance with that of similar schools.
- Ensure that the instructional needs of the school's significant population of English language learners are adequately and fully addressed.
- Use computers more fully across the curriculum to motivate and engage students and build their skills.
- Make more effective use of data to differentiate instruction for individual students.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school.

In the three years they have been together, the principal and his two assistant principals have worked effectively and efficiently as a team to lead Public School 117. By building on each other's strengths, they have positioned themselves as both key decision-makers and instructional advocates on behalf of students and staff. Teachers appreciate the culture of high expectations that has been collaboratively forged in the building and also the access to resources and instructional support.

The school has been intentional in designing a curriculum that matches its specific needs, having received exempt status from implementing the mandated curriculum. Teachers have developed a good curriculum that meets the needs of most groups of students, although the school acknowledges that there is room for improvement in the programs for English language learners.

The administrative team works closely with staff in grade level and individual conferences to frequently review student performance data and then suggest possible adjustments to the curriculum and teaching strategies. Of particular note is the school's clarity about what it means to deliver programs that are characterized by academic rigor. The school's diversity is effectively celebrated and incorporated into the curriculum through reading selections, writing assignments and social studies projects, thereby providing students with a sense of belonging and an impetus to engage and improve. Parents commend the principal and staff for knowing their names, celebrating the cultural diversity of the school, and seeking their input.

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 administrative team supplies all staff with an array of standardized test data, item analyses, and periodic assessments. In addition, the school has developed mock English language arts tests, templates for mathematics and conferencing notes, and reading assessments that are given every six weeks. Teachers maintain individual binders that contain standardized test scores, profiles of students receiving academic intervention services support, and literacy and mathematics conference notes. This data is reviewed on a continuous basis in a variety of venues and is used to good effect to inform decision-making about the curriculum and classroom practice. In addition, the administrative team conducts weekly grade-level conferences, frequent classroom walkthroughs and meetings with individual teachers to ensure the on-going review of relevant data and its effective use to drive decisions about adjusting teaching and learning. The principal also meets with grade level teachers to analyze sections that were problematic and decisions to adjust the curriculum are then put in place. Follow-up conversations with teachers are used to determine whether or not changes have positively impacted student achievement.

With the exception of year-end articulation cards, there is little evidence that multiple sources of achievement data are organized in a way that allows for the review of individual student progress over time. The school recognizes that it can do more to meet ongoing needs of sub-groups of students and has already started planning and instituting measures to address this. Good practice is already shown in the way in which ELL specialist teachers liaise with an assistant principal to review the individual progress of these students, success being reflected in the fact that they outperform this sub-group in similar schools.

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.

Teachers in this school have a variety of ways in which they assess students and they integrate a range of data to make decisions about adjusting the curriculum and their teaching strategies. They receive valuable feedback from the administrative team through informal and formal observations and share insights about student progress at grade level conferences.

A wide array of instructional supports are available to address the needs of English language learners (students speak thirty-four different languages) and lower-achieving students. They include but are not limited to the extended day program, push-in and pull-out English as a second language services, and academic intervention service targeted interventions. Special education students receive support in one of two self-contained classrooms, with a resource room or individualized education program teacher. A talented and gifted program consists of twice-weekly enrichment classes for 140 higher achieving students in grades 2 through 6.

Learning expectations are communicated through rubrics, learning objectives, and focus questions. In addition, students are expected to use ‘accountable talk’ as a way to define what they are learning. Evidence of all these indicators throughout the school as well as the upward trend in test scores highlights the impact of high expectations.

Student progress is monitored through work folders and in a writing portfolio that shows samples of student work over time. In many classes, students record a lesson’s objective, the focus question, and a variety of skill-building exercises in their journals. These tools are used effectively by teachers and students alike to benchmark achievement toward meeting both individual goals and school goals.

The principal deliberately shares test scores with parents, explaining how improvement can occur, describing what kinds of test preparation are occurring in the school and asking that parents provide reinforcement at home. Workshops such as this are well attended, as are monthly parent teacher meetings. The school communicates frequently with parents through letters, newsletters, and calendars and makes the extra effort to have items translated into languages such as Spanish, Russian, Bengali, and Urdu. Goals for student achievement are shared, and teachers are available to conference with parents when report cards are handed on. As one parent stated, “This school has an open door and an open hand policy. It is a welcoming and caring place.”

The principal has identified the instructional needs of English language learners as an area of concern that the school is not adequately addressing and is considering a variety of ways to provide more targeted support for them, especially in the context of the regular classroom setting.

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.

Because of previous student performance on standardized tests, the school is exempt from the mandated curriculum in literacy and mathematics. Instead, they have developed a customized literacy curriculum that includes a posted lesson objective, a focus question, guided reading, and an emphasis on writing. In addition, literacy is threaded throughout science and social studies lessons with an additional emphasis on critical thinking and analysis. Consequently, the school has shown steady progress in meeting its goals and in accelerating student achievement. In addition, the impact of their curriculum design can be seen in high levels of student engagement in classrooms and a robust daily attendance rate. However, the differentiation of instruction is delivered primarily through small group instruction without adequate attention to individual students. Opportunities to use computers across the curriculum to motivate students and build skills are missed.

The school’s schedule provides a common planning period for grade level teachers and this time is used to good effect to discuss the curriculum, monitor student progress, and adjust lesson pacing. The principal asks teachers to assess the quality of pull-out support against what might be accomplished if the student were to remain in the classroom and also tries to assure that pull-outs do not generate a lot of disruption. As a result, instructional time is protected and student focus is assured.

Curriculum design, the selection of staff, the acquisition and allocation of resources, and the use of time are all carefully aligned to provide for the strongest possible teaching and learning environment and consequently, high student achievement. A number of effective practices are in place to monitor and sustain high student attendance. Students have confidence in their teachers, and know they can turn to an adult for help if needed.

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 administrative team interviews potential new hires together and looks for specific expertise in the areas of literacy, mathematics or special education as well as an appreciation for the school’s cultural diversity. They also observe the work of substitute and student teachers in order to identify possible candidates for future employment. As a result, new hires are quickly integrated into the school’s culture of high expectations and are well positioned to use data effectively to plan for student achievement.

The administrative team uses formative and summative assessments to carefully identify the professional development needed to support the instructional agenda. To that end, they conduct frequent formal and informal classroom visits, survey teachers, and ask for

feedback on in-house sessions. Post-observation conferences frequently focus on what most recent data shows about student performance and how adjustments in practice might need to be considered. In-house professional development has included a number of relevant courses including looking at data while a partnership with St. John's University provides student teachers with similar training.

The school makes time during faculty conferences and grade level meetings for professional development. Teachers also take the initiative to observe their peers or to attend external conferences, efforts the administrative team supports by providing substitute teachers. As a cumulative result of these activities, teachers acquire new skills and expand their repertoire of teaching strategies in a way that positively impacts student achievement.

The principal is respected by staff, students and parents, and the school is well-organized and calm. Productive partnerships such as those with Project Arts/Learning Through Expanded Arts support learning and personal development.

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.

Once the school leadership team completes the annual Comprehensive Education Plan and sets broad goals for the school, the administrative cabinet and professional development team work successfully to ensure that these goals are addressed at grade and classroom levels, that progress is being made in meeting the goals or that changes are made to ensure future results. Data is reviewed periodically so that differentiated instruction and targeted professional development are put into place, although this is not yet consistent practice across the school.

Teachers maintain running records of all summative assessments, intervention services, and conferencing notes in literacy and mathematics in order to continuously review student progress. When areas of concern are identified, adjustments are made to classroom practice or consideration is given to increasing levels of intervention or support to ensure accelerated learning.

The principal uses a variety of measures to establish rigor in the academic program. Clearly stated lesson objectives and rubrics are used to help students understand exactly what they are going to learn, why the lesson content matters and how their work will be measured against a clearly established standard.

The use of frequent assessments and continuous adjustments to classroom practice are part of this school's agile response to addressing student needs in ways that both sustain and improve student progress.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Joyce Keld Briarwood School (PS 117)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score			X

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* 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.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.			X
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.			X
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.			X
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.			X
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.			X
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.			X
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X