



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Woodside School

Intermediate School 125

**46-02 47 Avenue
Queens
NY 11377**

Principal: Judy Mittler

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Information about the school

Public School 125, The Woodside School, is a grade 5 through 8 school located in the Woodside section of Queens. The school currently serves more than 1600 students of whom approximately 57% are Hispanic, 32% Asian, 7% White, and 4% Black. About 5% are special education students and more than 20% are English language learners. Although students speak in total more than 50 different languages, the most common home language is Spanish. The school receives Title I funding as more than 70% of students are eligible. Average daily attendance is around 95%, somewhat above the average for both similar schools (92%) and City schools (92%).

Students are grouped homogenously, with separate classes at each grade level for students performing below, at, and above standard. Advanced students sit for Regents examinations in Earth Science, Mathematics A, and foreign language proficiency.

This is an Empowerment school. Empowerment schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and her cabinet form a strong instructional leadership team that is bound together by a common educational vision and commitment to children.
- The leadership team makes good use of student performance data, including data from interim assessments, to identify schoolwide areas of strength and weakness.
- The principal promotes a culture of continuous improvement, well supported by her own skill as an effective resource manager and change agent.
- Teachers make good use of opportunities for teaming, leading to high levels of consistency in curriculum coverage, instruction, and knowledge of students.
- Teachers do an especially good job of understanding and documenting the individual needs of their students, and differentiating instruction accordingly.
- The workshop model of classroom instruction is well-established throughout the school, leading to high levels of student engagement.
- An orderly school climate is conducive to learning and enables adults and students to flourish.
- The school provides a broad range of support services that are effective in helping students in the greatest need of improvement overcome difficulties.
- The school has been especially effective in its attention to the needs of its English language learners, including pioneering an effective collaborative teaching model.
- The school provides a rich curriculum with an especially challenging set of higher-level courses and other opportunities for high achieving students.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue taking an inquiry-oriented approach to data analysis, gathering targeted data to explore specific issues and answer particular questions.
- Continue to ensure that every lesson has specific learning objectives and that teachers have ways of knowing what each student has learned.
- Develop a schoolwide system for scoring the quality of student portfolio work and explore ways to use this data as an additional measure of student learning.
- Provide additional opportunities for teachers to engage in the collaborative design, observation, and critique of lessons.
- Develop ways of aggregating annual gain targets for individual students (now in place) to formalize specific interim goals at the school and classroom level.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with well-developed features.

In spite of serving over 1600 students in grades 5 to 8 in a single large building, teachers and administrative staff have managed to create a safe and well-ordered learning community that meets high expectations on a daily basis while serving the needs of individual students. Factors that contribute in different ways to the school's success include: the division of the school into four separate houses, each with its own assistant principal, guidance counselor, and dean; strong instructional leadership and resource management; a consistent, caring, but no-nonsense approach to student behavior; widespread adoption of a workshop-based instructional model, resulting in high levels of student engagement; and a committed faculty who work well together under the expert guidance of the instructional leadership team. As a result there is considerable consistency in instruction, curriculum coverage, assessment practices, and knowledge of children.

The school has identified and begun to a work on several important areas of development. These include: the establishment of specific, measurable interim targets for student academic growth by classroom, grade level, subject area, and other sub-groupings of interest; increased use of data to answer specific questions; and increased opportunities for teachers to collaborate, particularly regarding the design, observation, and guided critique of lessons.

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school makes good use of available data from mandated City and State tests to measure and track student performance annually in core academic areas, disaggregated by grade level, gender, racial subgroups, and other important subgroups. In addition, the school has taken advantage of its status as an empowerment school to develop its own interim assessments. This year, teachers have begun working in teams to develop quarterly assessments in language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. The assessments are aligned with State tests and follow the same format. Already they are providing teachers and instructional leaders with useful data on areas of strength and weakness for individual students and classrooms. While multiple choice questions are scored automatically using optical scanning technology, teachers score the open-ended items for their own students. This allows teachers to focus on their own students' performance, but the practice raises questions of reliability.

The school has begun to use its own data to explore questions of its own. For example, a team has been collecting data on a group of approximately fifty under-achieving students in an attempt to find common factors that might help to explain their underperformance.

The school has been using data from mandated assessments, as well as from its own interim assessments, to track learning gains for individuals and grade cohorts, disaggregated by classroom. Useful comparisons are made across grade levels, classrooms, and subject areas. The school is well aware of its past performance as

measured against that of demographically similar schools and uses these comparisons to benchmark its own progress.

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.

School leaders engage the school community in the development of an annual Comprehensive Education Plan that sets incremental goals for progress on mandated assessments in accordance with federal “adequate yearly progress” guidelines. In addition, classroom teachers operate under the general understanding that they will attempt to move students up at least one proficiency level each year. However, although the school collects information from its new interim assessments, instructional leaders do not as yet set specific interim goals for the progress of grade-level cohorts, for individual classes, or for other groups of interest.

The school meets the needs of struggling students well. Students at each grade level who have in the past performed below standard on annual assessments are enrolled in a special class in which they receive instruction that is targeted to their identified needs. In addition, struggling students have opportunities for additional help from academic support staff who “push in” to classrooms. Additional support is available during the 37.5 minute extended day, after school, and on Saturday morning.

The school serves its large population of English language learners well, offering beginning, intermediate, and advanced English as a second language classes for these students. In addition, the school uses a collaborative team teaching model of instruction with these students, with a trained English as a second language teacher teaching alongside subject-area teachers in these classrooms.

The school works hard to engage parents as partners in their children’s education. Channels for communication include annual orientation meetings, quarterly report cards, interim progress reports, parent workshops and regular letters home. Parents who were interviewed as part of this quality review reported have regular communications with teachers regarding their children’s progress, including both e-mails and telephone calls.

Instructional leaders and teachers are strongly committed to the general goal of helping all students make continuous progress on challenging academic standards, no matter what their different starting points, and plan accordingly. These goals and plans drive the efforts of the entire school community.

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.

The school makes a special effort to ensure that its curriculum is well aligned with State standards by, for example, switching to a different mathematics series because the series it was previously using was inadequately aligned and by using a balanced approach to literacy, with special emphasis on reading and writing across the curriculum. Classrooms have their own libraries of books for independent reading, and teachers help students select books at their independent reading level, thus making it easier for them to advance.

Teachers keep records of individual student reading histories and assessment binders which contain rich records of student learning, including samples of student work. In most classes and subjects, student written work is scored using task-specific analytics, often leading to a single aggregate score with a short comment. The school has plans to develop a more uniform system for scoring student work across grade levels and subject areas, eventually providing additional evidence of student learning. Advanced students sit for Regents examinations in Earth Science, Mathematics A, and foreign language proficiency.

Teachers hold themselves accountable, and are held accountable by instructional leaders, for helping all students make progress and master high standards, no matter what their starting points. Teachers use assessment information to differentiate their instruction to individual student needs in a number of different ways. In addition to forming classes based largely on scores from previous year's tests, teachers often group students within classes according to their achievement, and assign tasks that are appropriate to their current skill level. For example, the class might be given the common task of mapping the plot structure of a fairy tale, with different groups reading different fairy tales, based on their current reading level.

The principal capably manages her budget, schedule, and human resources in order to provide the best possible environments for teaching and learning. For example, by dividing the school into four separate "houses," each with its assistant principal, guidance counselor, and dean, the school has been able to give increased attention to individual children, and provide a new focus for collaborative teamwork, and by hiring additional teachers of English as a second language it has been able to better serve the needs of the school's English language learners. The principal is, in addition, considering using the additional flexibility that Empowerment school status brings to do away with a mandated advisory system and allow more common planning and professional development time for teachers.

Instructional leaders strongly promote a workshop-style instructional model which leads to effective student engagement. Classroom visits conducted as part of this quality review revealed consistent implementation of this model, with high-level questioning, accountable talk, hands-on activities and high levels of student engagement,. While most lessons had a clear, measurable learning objective, it was not always clear how teachers would know whether all students would have firmly mastered the objective by the end of the lesson.

Teachers and instructional leaders make a point of knowing students well as individuals. In addition to paying close attention to their academic progress, the school attends to the students' many other needs, quickly identifies problems, and works relentlessly to solve them, for example, by providing clothing for children if this is needed. As a result, children know they have more than one adult on the staff they can trust. Attendance averages around 95%, but any prolonged absence triggers immediate attention.

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 assembled a team of skillful, committed teachers who work especially well together. Teachers are hired in part for their commitment to reflective practice and ability to use data to drive instruction.

Professional development is guided directly by student needs. For example, in view of the growing numbers of English language learners, most classroom teachers have now received English as a second language training. Teachers appreciate the support they receive from their colleagues and from instructional leaders. They report that in-house learning opportunities, integrated in collaborative work, are far more important to their professional growth than external workshops. The collaborative work on the school's new system of internal interim assessments is an example of this.

The principal, assistant principal, and instructional coaches are in classrooms every day. Teachers appreciate the respectful, supportive way in which observations are carried out and the healthy balance of commendations and recommendations from instructional leaders which helps teachers grow professionally. Teachers review results and plan together in grade-level teams.

The principal is a respected instructional leader and change agent who, with her assistant principals and deans, ensures the smooth running of the school. She and her staff, in their own words, "make a big deal out of small things" and in this way consistently enforce and support high expectations for teachers and students alike. The school has numerous partnerships with community organizations such as Sunnyside Community Services and the Sports and Arts in School Foundation that serve to extend and enrich learning opportunities for children.

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.

Development of the school's Comprehensive Education Plan is an annual process, with goals driven largely by federal guidelines for "adequate yearly progress." Progress toward these goals is monitored on a yearly basis and plans are revised accordingly. Throughout the year, teachers and instructional leaders look closely at student progress as measured by interim assessments. Teachers adjust plans accordingly, stopping to re-teach if necessary. Students who were interviewed as part of this quality review reported that their teachers typically do not continue on to a new topic or skill until all students in the class have mastered it.

Instructional leaders monitor progress for both individual students and classrooms. If overall progress in a given classroom is substantially below expectations, this leads to a conversation with the classroom teacher. However, instructional leaders do not as yet set specific interim goals for student progress, such as might be aligned directly with the longer-term goals outlined in the school improvement plans. As a result, leaders are not yet able to hold themselves accountable for incremental progress toward long-term goals sufficiently rigorously.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Woodside School (IS 125)	∅	✓	+
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	