



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Abigail Adams School

Public School 131

170-45 84th Avenue

Queens

NY 11432

Principal: Randolph Ford

Dates of review: November 30 - December 4, 2006

Reviewer: David Taylor

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The school has had to respond quickly to rapid change including changes to the size of its enrollment, which now stands at around 665 students, having quite recently risen to a peak of over 900. The latest ethnic breakdown indicates that the majority population is Asian (59%), with 18% Black students, 17% Hispanic and 5% White. The percentage of students recently arrived in the country is significantly higher than that for City and other schools. The school has a large number of English language learners, some 29% of all students in the current year, and 34 (around 5%) special education students. Abigail Adams School is a Title 1 school.

Attendance figures are consistently over 90%, with some fluctuation, but remain close to the average for New York City schools. The school works a wide range of partners.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is unusually well developed in its thinking about education and in the quality of professional development.
- Leadership of the school is innovative and extremely closely and effectively focused on setting and achieving demanding goals for all students.
- Staff work collaboratively to align the instructional program to the needs of all students, with an appropriate focus on differentiated tasks and outcomes.
- The school's exemplary use of data enables staff to track students' progress closely and to achieve notable gains in their performance.
- Parental liaison is strong and skillfully led, with well-supported workshops and impressively high turn-outs at meetings of teachers and parents.
- The school's performance in City and State tests continues to improve, showing excellent progress and a high level of student achievement.
- Teachers' commitment to students is extremely strong and is characterized by the positive atmosphere they create, which is highly conducive to learning.
- The school provides excellent enrichment activities both within and beyond the formal curriculum.
- Classrooms and hallways are inviting places, generally packed with stimulus for students and acknowledgement of the range and high quality of work produced.
- Teaching staff are very well supported by a range of non-teacher colleagues.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the longitudinal tracking of students' written work through the school from beginning to fifth grade, to ensure that all make consistent progress and that data analysis is fully used to measure the progress of plans.
- Continue to work at developing distributed leadership of the curriculum and instruction at administrative, cabinet and grade levels, involving teachers as fully as possible in class visitation.
- Focus on written feedback to students, to provide diagnostic comment for further improvement of their performance

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

This school is unusually effective in promoting and achieving very high levels of success for its students, both in standardized tests and in their wider development. It has a strong sense of mission, communicated clearly to all staff and to the wider community. The leaders are focused, intelligent and innovative - quietly proud of their school but never complacent. The school's success is based on extremely well-conceived and committed ideas about education, coupled with a belief in the value of applied research and the importance of developing the professional skills of those working in it. Not surprisingly, the school and its principal are frequently seen and used by others as examples of excellent practice.

Members of staff respond well to the high expectations of them. Teams within the school provide a first-rate demonstration of effective collaboration and teamwork, leading to shared goals, methods and enthusiasm. Teachers' first thoughts are for the students, and they derive confidence from seeing them flourish.

Students show extremely high levels of application to their studies, in which they are often strongly supported by their parents. They behave with courtesy and respect. They receive constant support and encouragement from staff, who set out clear learning paths and goals for them and maintain high expectations for all, with a firm commitment to the inclusion of every child in the success story and a belief, grounded in the evidence of many students, that all can succeed to a high level.

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 has unusually full and systematic ways of collecting data. It combines close analysis of all scores achieved by students in a wide range of external tests, including Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System, State standardized tests and many others, with its own close internal monitoring. In particular, the development of school-based interim progress reports, based on tests for which teachers at grade level take responsibility, has enabled the school to keep a close eye on how students are performing in the period between State and City assessments. Extremely clear recording of all results, using an effective software program which gives print-outs that are easily read and interpreted, enables teachers to see at a glance where problems may be occurring. For example, a test on students' mathematical understanding revealed unexpected difficulties regarding concepts of time. This led to a revision of the curriculum to ensure that the topic was handled more thoroughly.

The school attaches considerable importance to its understanding of the performance of different groups. There is a substantial group of English language learners, and programs

for these are well developed. The school takes great care in the analysis of other groups of students, including the talented and gifted. There is particularly close tracking of how the school's current performance compares with the past, although the transient nature of the school's population makes such comparison difficult. The school benchmarks itself against high-performing schools in the City, and uses such comparisons to ensure appropriate expectations, but the school does not always use these fully to measure progress against its plans or to ensure that all students make consistent 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 well developed.

Clear and ambitious goals have been established, not least through the five-year strategy and the Comprehensive Educational Plan. The principal and assistant principal use regular communications, including a bulletin to all staff, to reinforce commitment to these goals. Planning to achieve them is detailed and comprehensive. It covers the full range of the curriculum, and is especially effective at grade levels, where teachers have a close understanding of how to plan their work collaboratively to meet the students' needs.

The school is especially focused on the needs of English language learners and others with barriers to their learning. It provides academic intervention services that include detailed individual plans, and uses the range of data sensitively to promote the effective learning of those students operating at level 1 or level 2. The school's approach is based strongly on high expectations, which are embedded in a range of documentation shared with students and with parents or caregivers. The school also celebrates the students' accomplishments with displays on bulletin boards. There is regular dialogue with both students and parents over how to evaluate and improve performance and the school listens carefully to the feedback it receives from these sources, making adjustments to its plans accordingly, although written feedback to students on how to improve their work is not always clear enough.

This concerted drive towards improving the quality of students' performance is seen in the working of the cabinet, the guidance given by the coaches in literacy and mathematics, and the meetings of the school leadership team. In addition, the parent coordinator plans activities which help to ensure that parents and caregivers are in no doubt of the importance the school attaches to each child's progress. The school receives strong support from many parents for its stand on the importance of hard work, especially on regular, focused homework from the early years of schooling. Parents are also mostly very willing to attend conferences, with a very high turn-out for teachers' meetings.

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 has available comparative data referring to the full range of the Teachers' College curriculum. Teachers are adept at using such data to plan the curriculum and their instructional programs. There is a clear focus in the teaching on ensuring that students

understand what they are meant to be learning and can assess their own work to see how well the learning objective has been achieved.

The school is effective at managing the available resources, which include supplementary grants from various sources, to promote students' achievement. The allocation of staffing responsibilities is made effectively in the light of clear analysis of teachers' strengths. Weekly schedules are planned carefully and ensure that students are able to benefit from the full range of activities. The school provides opportunities for enrichment during the scheduled curriculum, for example the 'Glee Club', which meets on Friday afternoon and attracts many students to the opportunity for choral singing. While students are pulled out for such activities, their peers continue in class, undertaking worthwhile curriculum activities.

The teachers are proficient at engaging students in their own learning, although there is sometimes room for further development in this area. They employ a deliberate mix of teaching methods in order to retain the students' interest and attention. Asking students to work in pairs is a method frequently employed successfully to test students' understanding, enabling them to explain things to their partner and allowing the partner in return to frame investigative questions. Teachers are then able to focus on particular students and check their understanding and progress.

Relationships are excellent. Students learn in a calm and purposeful atmosphere, and are confident in dealing with adults. Those on the student council are powerful ambassadors for the school's philosophy. Several students indicate an intelligent grasp of the goals of the school and of how important it was to aim high and work hard. They feel known and respected by their classroom teachers and often by other members of staff.

The school gives high priority to ensuring that all students benefit from the opportunities it provides and attendance rates are consistently well above 90%. The intervention strategies for dealing with absence are effective. A notable feature of the school is the complete absence in recent years of suspensions of students, which reflects the quality of relationships and the students' excellent demeanor.

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 worked hard, within existing constraints, to secure the staff he wants in order to get the results he wants. Teachers are carefully selected to ensure they have the attitudes and skills that will have beneficial effects on the quality of teaching.

The school sees well-focused professional development as a vital key to raising students' performance, and its plans are directed to ensuring that staff are able to acquire the skills required for the job. In particular, where staff are taking on additional responsibility, for example as literacy or mathematics coach, care is taken to use the best available programs of training for what is a significant change to their role and relationship with other teachers. There is also a strong climate of professional development for teams working together, which contributes to improving the quality of teaching.

The principal and assistant principal undertake regular visits to classes, both formal and informal, and offer teachers valuable feedback. The three coaches for literacy and

mathematics also spend much time in the classroom, observing teaching and discussing methodology. There is some inter-visitation of classes by teachers, but this is not yet fully established.

A strong feature of the way members of staff work together is their extensive sharing of ideas and practice. This collaborative approach is also seen in the way in which staff review their professional practice and look at the performance and progress of students.

The principal is clearly held in high regard. He is a very experienced and effective leader who understands the classroom and how to get the best out of people. He is supported by an assistant principal with an unusual breadth of vision and experience. The two work closely together. Staff comment positively on the harmonious nature of their cooperation and they think in similar ways about how to move the school forward. They are now seeking to empower their coaches and grade leaders, so that leadership is increasingly developed at all levels.

There is a calm, efficient feel to the way the school conducts its business. Its climate is positive and welcoming. Regular communication ensures that staff know what is expected of them, and they respond meticulously to what is required. The school has established effective partnerships within the local community and beyond. These include the Fulbright Member Foundation Master Teacher Program, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Learning through an Expanded Arts Program and partnerships with local high schools and St John's University.

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.

The school has recently given particular attention to its developing use of interim assessments to review how well plans are working to achieve the stated goals. This has enabled it to focus on ways of adjusting the curriculum to align it more precisely with individual students' needs. These interim assessments are used both to see how different classes in the same grade are performing and to identify particular issues for individual students.

The school does not hesitate to make changes when these are called for by the evidence from data, for example, the decision to change from having separate talented and gifted classes. The school regularly analyzes data and revises plans in the light of new information.

The school's leadership is responsive and adaptable, and it uses resources imaginatively to support learning. The benefits both of the sustained strategic planning and the willingness to adjust where necessary are evident in the real progress that the school has made. This is a school with a mission, certainly, but also a clear sense of how to achieve it. The students' achievements and their delight in the school are eloquent testimony to this success.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME Abigail Adams School (PS 131)	∅	✓	+
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