



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Parsons School

Junior High School 168

**158 - 40 76th Road
Queens
NY 11366**

Principal: Ms J Gewuerz

Dates of review: November 3 – 6, 2006

Reviewer: M Groucutt

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Parsons School is a small, culturally diverse school with 241 enrolled students. Of these, 217 are in general education, with a further 24 (11%) being special education students. There are currently 30 English language learners. The current breakdown shows 25% of the students are Hispanic, 20% are Black, 13% are White and 42% from Asian or other backgrounds. The school receives Title 1 funding.

Attendance currently stands at 93.5%, which is above the City average of 91.6%.

There are two other schools on the same site, including a specialized school for students with autism situated on the third floor of the building. Some of these students are supported by their paraprofessionals in general education classrooms within The Parsons School. Recent changes to enrollment patterns as well as declining birthrate in the local area have resulted in a decrease in the number of students entering the school each year.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal, well supported by her assistant principal, provides effective leadership.
- The development of the teacher assessment notebook provides teachers with easily understood data on the progress of students.
- Classrooms are well organized and set out as effective learning environments.
- The America's Choice curriculum is delivered in a flexible way that best meets identified needs of the students.
- There are positive relationships between adults and students and students say they feel safe in school.
- The effective use of common planning time by the teachers is supporting professional dialogue and team work.
- The quality of artwork around the school enhances the atmosphere of the building.
- "Project Wisdom" supports the development of student self-esteem, together with their multi-ethnic, multi-cultural understanding.
- The "Ducky of the Week" award helps to promote student engagement.
- The encouragement of community use of the premises helps the school to provide a focus for its neighborhood.

What the school needs to improve

- Make better use of data to track individuals and groups of students.
- Develop a greater use of individual differentiation.
- Develop the use of technology across the curriculum as a tool for teaching and learning.
- Make better use of individual portfolios of students' work to show evidence of progress over time.
- Make the quality of all instruction as good as that of the best.
- Look for even better ways to celebrate the ethnic and cultural diverse student population of the school.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Parsons School is now in its fourth year with America's Choice, a program designed for middle schools which focuses on the use of data to track student progress. One feature of the school is its ethnic diversity, though there is little evidence of a clear celebration of this in writing, artwork and display around the school, even though the quality of display is generally good.

As a result of the falling enrollment, several teachers have left the school, two of the three guidance counselors have been lost and two of the three former assistant principals have similarly moved on. There is continuing uncertainty over the future of the school, which makes it difficult to plan for the future. The principal, however, continues to make strong attempts to develop staff and maintain morale.

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 is an America's Choice school, therefore the teachers at Parsons are expected to monitor student progress on an ongoing basis using a portfolio system and through regular informal classroom assessment and analysis of student work. While this is in place, the portfolios as they currently stand would benefit from further refinement, and the teachers could make more effective use of test results to modify instruction to accurately match the students' needs.

However, there is effective use of common planning time by the teachers when faculty members meet together on a weekly basis. This is promoting good dialogue between colleagues and, at a time when the school is uncertain as to its future, effective team work. This gives teachers good opportunities to look at student data from a range of sources. These include the Grow Report, the Princeton Review and diagnostic analyses, together with more informal sources such as conferencing and internal assessments. These allow teachers to look at and compare the progress of individual students over the course of the year. As a result, some constructive work is being done in analyzing the performance of different groups of students, for example the disaggregated data on the performance of different ethnic groups. However, at the moment the overall analysis of student work could be taken further, for example in the development of individually differentiated instruction.

The school understands that it needs to improve its performance as it makes comparisons between itself and other similar local schools, which are generally performing better. In the latest figures available for the 8th grade students, only 30% are performing at level 3 or 4 in language arts, and the percentage in mathematics is only 36%. However, the school has more success in moving students up from level 1. For example, in the special education population between 2003 and 2005, there was a 7.8% decrease in the number

of level 1 scores English language arts, and general education students in mathematics achieved a 14% decrease.

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.

A teacher assessment notebook is used as part of the America’s Choice program. This is used to record information on progress throughout the year. Originally it only focused on English language arts, but now it is being extended to cover progress in mathematics. The notebook is the principal means of enabling teachers to see the progress made by individual students over the course of the year. However, the development of effective portfolios of work is lagging behind and therefore failing to support teachers’ analysis of students.

The use of data on progress features in the common planning meetings; this is enabling teachers to develop effective forums for discussion and team building. However, it is admitted that sometimes information on students is retained inside teachers’ heads, rather than in the notebook, and there is a need to ensure that information recording is thorough and accurate. This development in the professional practice of teachers is beginning to improve the effectiveness of teaching; it is also supporting and improving student learning, particularly when students’ specific individual needs and the effectiveness of student groupings are discussed and evaluated. Common planning time is enabling teachers to develop common standards and expectations in the use of data, sharing good practice and creating a forum in which the coaches can support professional developments.

One good use of data is to identify students at risk of falling behind. A system is in place that enables parents to be alerted through interim progress reports. These are sent out before the formal marking periods have ended, enabling teachers to share concerns with parents and the students themselves.

At team meetings there is discussion on using the notebook as a diagnostic tool. At one such meeting, teachers discussed how findings could be shared with the students, so that they are kept aware of their progress and what their teachers think of their work as the year progresses. However, the emphasis is focused at the group level and there little evidence of individual differentiation taking place at present.

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.

Many of the materials used in the America’s Choice program are chosen because they effectively channel the energy and curiosity of early adolescents. This school has shown itself to be flexible in its use of the America’s Choice framework. This has allowed it to match work to the interests of the students. A good example of this is seen in the decision taken after identifying from the data that reading remained a problem. The response has

been to change over to an emphasis on non-fiction materials, which are felt to be more relevant to the particular students currently in the school.

The quality of instruction and the assessment of student work are inconsistent at the moment, not helped by the changes in staffing as a result of declining student and teacher numbers. The decline in numbers has also created training needs which are not being fully met, such as the need to train new teachers to deliver the Wilson reading materials. However, the reduction in student numbers does have some positive benefits as it means that teachers have more time to spend with individual students. Smaller numbers and this more personal contact have also helped to create a better learning culture in which students feel safe. The good quality of displays and artwork around the school help to foster a feeling that this is a positive place in which to learn. The adults in the school have developed supportive relationships with the students, who in turn appreciate and respond positively to this through their own learning. The classrooms themselves reflect the clear expectations of the principal in the creation of a purposeful environment. Student efforts are rewarded through the "Ducky of the Week" award, which is a fun way of engaging students in the school community.

Title 1 funding is used effectively to enhance staffing levels and support the coaches, as well as for purchasing America's Choice materials. The principal works hard to maintain levels of funding for identified priorities.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal and the assistant principal provide effective leadership during a period of great instability caused by the uncertainty over the future of the school. The principal has been at the school for ten years, the first five as assistant principal. In her second year as principal she decided to participate in the America's Choice program as a response to the perceived needs of the school. However, in its second year with this program, the enrollment began to fall and the school began losing key staff and coaches. This has diminished the impact of this work in subsequent years.

The falling number of students means that the principal has not had many opportunities to appoint new staff. The lack of new blood has made it harder to build commitment to using data to drive up the quality of instruction, or to raise expectations for student performance. Nevertheless, she is working effectively to set up frameworks that will support this from within the staff that are already in the school.

As teachers have come and gone there has been a real challenge for the school to continue developing instructional staff. It is to the great credit of the school that teachers have, on the whole, remained committed to supporting the progress of their students. Areas that have been identified by the school for development are supported effectively by the professional development program for teachers. This clearly helps to build the future capacity of the school and is effective in setting collaborative goals and developing teamwork. These factors in turn are improving the effectiveness of teaching, despite the difficulties caused by the fluctuating staffing.

The use of Project Wisdom makes an effective start to the day during home room time. This is a program that is read to classes over the loudspeaker and provides materials

aimed at promoting individual self-esteem. The program features thoughts and sayings from a wide variety of cultures and ethnic backgrounds and is intended to boost students' appreciation of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community in which they live, which is more diverse than in many areas of New York. The school seeks to maximize community use of its facilities.

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 is developing its ability to use the data it has to evaluate individual student progress. At present, it is used primarily to identify group needs, rather than for developing more individually-based instruction. One of the areas identified for professional development is that of improving the use of technology in the classroom to support differentiated instruction through offering the higher achieving students a chance to continue to a higher level of study through individualized research work, while the lower achievers will be supported through targeted software packages. Training is also planned in the use of the two interactive smartboards that the school has acquired, so the school will be in a position to move forward in this area when training has been completed.

When teacher assessment notebooks are used well, they provide an effective way of monitoring individual student progress. Teachers and students both benefit from this, since teachers are aware of the level at which students are performing, while students can see for themselves the progress they are making, encouraging them to do even better. The school is also taking advantage of its reduced class sizes to allow teachers to spend more quality time with individual students, which is something that they appreciate, and which is supporting the moves towards refining existing good practice and adopting a more personalized focus.

The principal has a clear view of the areas for improvement, and has taken some positive actions to improve achievement. However, partly due to staffing changes, this is not consistently shared with all staff. Where a need is identified in the school, it is clear that the school responds by taking appropriate steps. Examples include support for students in the extended day and also in the Saturday program which is just getting underway.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Parsons School [JHS 168]	∅	✓	+
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	