



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Gun Hill Road School

**Public School 041
3352 Olinville Avenue
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Erika Tobia

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Reviewer: Stuart Satinet

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Gun Hill Road School is a kindergarten through grade 5 school with approximately 890 students. It is located in the Northeast Bronx. The student population is approximately 66% Black, 31% Hispanic, and about 2% Asian and 2% White. There are approximately 10% English language learner students and 11% special education students.

The school is seeking to develop its buildings through a scheme to reorganize the library, plans have been drawn up and funding has been sought. Teachers use the spaces well to make a bright and interesting learning environment. There is an accommodation utilization of 92%. Figures for 2003-05 indicate that the percentage of students who were Title 1 eligible was approximately 86% which is slightly above similar schools. Average attendance figures are comparable with those of similar and City schools (92%). The community has considerable population change and high mobility with a student stability of about 89%.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The new principal is providing energetic, clear-thinking and decisive leadership with an uncompromising focus on raising achievement at all levels.
- The administration is working collaboratively with a committed team of teachers to achieve a shared view of how the school can improve further.
- The school has developed systems to gather data effectively which are contributing to a clearer view of the skills of students.
- There is a significant improvement in the school's engagement with the community in a short space of time so that parents are now more willing to see themselves as partners.
- Collaboration is being developed through professional learning teams, encouraging staff to discuss teaching strategies and analyze the learning needs of students.
- A well targeted program of professional development is developing the skills of teachers in key areas.
- The school has developed a clear focus on the early development of literacy skills which is supported by key appointments of specialist staff.
- Ambitious plans to develop the school buildings have energized the school community and engendered a belief in positive change.
- An imaginative arts program has raised expectations among students.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop clear action plans that describe the steps to be taken to carry out school improvement.
- Extend the analysis of data at a whole-school level so that regular and informed judgments can be made about the effectiveness of the school in meeting the needs of different groups of students.
- Coordinate approaches to attendance, lateness, parental engagement and positive behavior strategies.
- Involve students in developing their own learning goals.
- Increase the level of information to parents about the curriculum and skills development to build their confidence in supporting their children.
- Achieve a closer alignment of work to the needs of individual students.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

There has been a high turnover of staff for some years combined with high student mobility and this has presented challenges for the school. The new principal has clear ideas as to how the school can be improved. She has an ambitious agenda for change which is focused on creating a safe environment and raising achievement. The school is aware that it needs to develop the use of data in its drive to raise achievement.

The school is rapidly developing its understanding of how the use of data can influence students' progress. There has been a rapid shift in culture which has had an impact on school tone and expectations. Students and parents have responded to the changes by increased levels of engagement and this is beginning to have an impact on teaching and learning. Some key appointments have been made which have increased the level of team work in meeting the needs of students. The new administration team is developing a collaborative approach to school improvement.

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

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

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school has made considerable progress in developing the range and quality of data it generates which has had an impact on teachers' understanding of the skill levels of students. Data-gathering procedures have been introduced which have improved the consistency of record keeping at class and grade level and raised levels of awareness. Class teachers keep assessment binders and student portfolios which have been effective in developing a more comprehensive view of students' strengths and weaknesses.

Frequent reviews of data take place through discussions at professional learning team meetings and these are beginning to be used to increase the effectiveness of teaching and achieve gains in achievement. However, the use of data across the school is variable and it is recognized by the administration that more consistency would increase student achievement further.

Intervention strategies have been re-focused as a result of data analysis. For instance, potential holdover students have been identified and their skills developed through a greater emphasis on literacy in the lower grades. At present there is insufficient use of data on the performance of gender and ethnic groups, or comparison between grades, subject areas or different classes. The new principal and administration recognize that more regular scrutiny of whole-school data will enable them to evaluate progress and decide on other groups in need of intervention.

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.

The principal has clear priorities for the development of the school and has established measurable goals for school improvement. Overall goals have been translated to grade and class level where effective work is taking place to track the individual progress of all students through the use of assessment portfolios. Teachers have a clear awareness of the improvement agenda and recognize they are accountable for monitoring the progress of their students against targets. Collaborative meetings are held each week where data is discussed and the performance of individual students is analyzed. These have been effective in achieving a clearer focus on skill development which is beginning to inform teaching strategies and raise achievement.

Students who are in most need of support are a high priority and skill levels have been improved at a faster rate as a result. There is recognition that the foundations for good test scores and academic development are laid in the early years and this has led the school to re-focus its work to ensure that grades kindergarten through 2 benefit from specialist support and intervention. There is strong evidence of literacy work with younger students being effective in overcoming skills deficits for those in greatest need of improvement.

The school has made considerable effort to re-engage with the community. Letters now go home in English and Spanish and a series of workshops has been successful in drawing in large numbers of interested parents. This has started a dialogue with parents but there is recognition that communication on academic matters is relatively undeveloped. At this stage, students are insufficiently involved in evaluating their own progress and agreeing what they need to do to develop further and many parents lack the information to work with their children on skill development.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school has recently introduced several new programs which align effectively with the mandated curriculum and tackle low levels of literacy. Professional development has effectively supported the introduction of new approaches. Teachers have been empowered to link their teaching more closely to the learning needs of students. There are good examples of differentiated teaching activities in the school but practice is inconsistent.

Scheduling decisions have been used effectively to provide opportunities to support teachers in the development of new strategies and the consideration of data. The

structuring of blocks of time for teachers to work together has been effective in increasing team work. The principal has been energetic in seeking to supplement the school budget by drawing in additional resources. Of particular note is the high profile campaign to build a new library which has engaged students and parents in working to support the further development of their school. This, in part, is a response to the need to raise literacy levels which has been identified as the result of data scrutiny. It has affected the tone and confidence of the school community, generating a belief in improvement.

Considerable work is being done to raise expectations and engage students and the improvement of student attendance and punctuality has had a very high profile as evidenced by newsletters and notice boards. The school is focused on rapid improvement in these areas because of the impact they have on the learning of the students. The administration recognize that they will be most effective if they develop a coherent strategy which links parental engagement with student behavior and attendance.

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 new administration team which has been developed recently is committed to bringing about change and this is already having an impact on the quality of the work in the school. There is a clear emphasis on high expectations but recognition that fully establishing cultural change requires a collaborative approach across the organization. Teachers value the open style and are responding to it.

The principal has taken a proactive approach to staff appointments, visiting the hiring halls, insisting on demonstration lessons and supporting new teachers with professional development. This has paid dividends in the quality of teachers appointed. Appropriate strategies have been put in place to counter the high turnover of staff.

New policies and new staff have required a significant investment in professional development and this has taken place in team meetings as well as on allocated days. A culture of team working has successfully been developed and this has encouraged the sharing of strategies. There is a clear focus on linking data to teaching and this is evidenced by meeting agendas and professional development programs. Coaches provide effective support, advise on materials and model teaching approaches. This approach is successfully reinforced through the use of inter-visitations where good practice is identified and shared and is impacting on the range of strategies used in the school. The principal has also placed high importance on frequent lesson observation as a means of developing teaching further. This has been a cultural change for the school effectively improving the quality of classroom teaching and identifying areas for further professional development.

The principal has the confidence of the community and has a high profile. There is an ambition to move the school forward and evidence that this is happening successfully. Effective collaboration through Project Arts has raised the expectations of students through their involvement in imaginative music, ballet and arts programs. Support and community-based organizations contribute to students' achievement.

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

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school's Comprehensive Education Plan is now starting to be translated into more detailed action plans for further development. There has been a significant emphasis on detailed skills analysis at grade and class level which has involved teachers in regular review of plans to improve the performance of students. The professional learning teams and academic intervention service meetings are effective in considering diagnostic assessments, monitoring progress and amending interventions as necessary.

All teachers are encouraged to be flexible in their approaches and to gear their teaching to the needs of the students based on knowledge of what the collected data tells them. This is starting to have an impact on classroom practice and has led to sharper evaluation of individual student needs by some teachers. The overall practice in this area is proficient and teachers are much clearer about how to bring about improvements in student performance as evidenced by their discussion and records of meetings. There is a clear willingness to adjust strategies to respond to data driven information on performance.

In grades 3 through 5, Annual School Report data shows the school performing above similar schools. Ambitious targets have been set for further improvement and are kept under review with teachers being held accountable. The school has sharpened its monitoring procedures by extending good practice into grades kindergarten through 2 so that the same rigor is applied to the early grades.

The grade and class analyses stem from the need to respond to whole-school improvement goals which have success criteria linked to progress in State and City tests and Comprehensive Education Plan targets. The broad goals are not consistently broken down into more detailed development plans. They do not include more detailed and time-referenced success criteria to assist regular evaluation and refocusing. The principal acknowledges that the school has further progress to make in reviewing data to understand the implications for particular groups of students or the impact of gender or cultural differences.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Gun Hill Road School (PS 041)	∅	✓	+
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	