



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Benjamin Franklin School

Public School 55

**450 Saint Paul's Place
Bronx
NY 10546**

Principal: Luis E. Torres

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Reviewer: Jeffery Plumb

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Benjamin Franklin School is an elementary school which serves 721 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. There are 58% Hispanic students, 41% Black and 1% from other ethnic groups. Twenty-five percent of students are English language learners and 16% are special education students. Three self-contained kindergarten special education classes were created in September 2006. Attendance at 93% is above the average for similar and City schools. The school receives Title 1 funding for 93.5% of its students, a figure higher than similar schools and significantly higher than City schools. There is a Montefiore clinic on site which services students' medical needs.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is resilient and provides energetic and effective leadership.
- The school promotes students' health and fitness very well.
- Student behavior and engagement with learning is good.
- The guided reading program contributes successfully to raising achievement in reading.
- The support for special education students is good.
- The baseline assessment in kindergarten provides a good benchmark against which to measure student progress.
- The active recruitment of male staff role models motivates boys with challenging behavior to become eager learners.
- Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions based on student data are strong features of the school
- There is a willingness to experiment and be flexible in trialing new methods.
- The school has been successful in encouraging good attendance.
- The family literacy program for African parents and caregivers is good.

What the school needs to improve

- Raise achievement in English language arts.
- Continue to narrow the gap in achievement in mathematics when measured against similar schools.
- Engage the assistant principals more directly in whole school strategic planning.
- Improve communication with parents and involve them more directly in setting achievement goals for their children.
- Ensure that the success criteria on the Comprehensive Education Plan are more closely aligned to be effective measures of student outcomes.
- Ensure consistency in instructional practice through the school.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Since the principal's appointment, eighteen months ago, this school has improved significantly. The gap in the City mathematics test results compared with similar schools has narrowed noticeably. Results in the English language arts test remain a concern and it is too early to evaluate the impact of decisive actions taken to raise achievement in this area. Analysis of data is used well to differentiate instruction to drive up standards in writing.

Services for special education students are good. Students and parents view the principal as a breath of fresh air. They say, 'He has turned this school around'. Attendance and behavior have improved and students now enjoy coming to school because it is safe and they can learn well. Tough decisions have been made to hold teachers to account, but the principal has not delegated sufficient management responsibility to his three assistant principals. The use of data to inform planning is developing well. A culture has been created where the vast majority of teachers care that every student, every day, learns and grows. A number of recently implemented whole school initiatives have begun to make a significant difference to raising achievement and enjoyment for students. The capacity for further improvement promises well for the future.

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 gathers and uses a wide range of teacher assessment and test data to build up a detailed picture of what each student knows and can do. The school leaders ensure that teachers are provided with good data about the achievement of individual students. Teachers use this effectively to track the progress of individual students over time. Teacher conferencing linked to the guided reading scheme enables teachers to monitor student progress effectively. The baseline assessment in kindergarten is a particular strength and is used as a benchmark to measure progress. Grade data is gathered weekly and regular two monthly interim assessments indicate how classes perform.

Detailed analysis of the English language arts test results revealed that the English language learners underperformed in writing. Decisive action has been taken to improve their performance, but it is too early to evaluate its impact. The use of data to identify special education students is a strong feature and their progress is monitored rigorously by the additional instruction support team. The school is less effective in gathering data about other groups. For example, it has a hunch that bi-lingual Hispanic students do less well than African English language learners, but lacks the hard evidence to back this up. It does not gather evidence about the performance of sheltered students. However, it has good data on the performance of a group of boys with challenging behaviors. Systems to monitor their improvements in behavior and learning are robust.

Energy and commitment has gone into benchmarking how the school performs compared with its model similar school and it measures itself effectively against past performance. Test result analysis reveals students have weak inference skills and this information has been used to realign programs and instructional practice to drive up standards. Other measures based on comparisons are more ad hoc and inconsistent.

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.

Good organizational structures put in place by the principal enable various teams of teachers to meet regularly to plan and set goals to raise student achievement. For example, the kindergarten team meets weekly and uses data to set goals to accelerate student learning. Common planning time enables class teachers of the same grade to come together regularly and set goals to improve consistency in programs and instructional practice. The English language arts and mathematics coaches use data in their work with teachers to set goals to raise students’ achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. The assistant principals are insufficiently involved in setting the goals for long-range improvement and this is a weakness.

Planning and setting of goals for students whose performance has been identified as a particular focus area are variable. For special education students there are good procedures. The reading recovery teachers meet regularly and set goals to improve students’ reading. Recently, based on data that showed a student could not recall a high frequency word from one day to the next, her program was realigned and her learning has been accelerated as a result. However, data about difficulties certain bi-lingual Hispanic students experience is blurred and goal setting to improve their performance is not always clear.

Students say, ‘The principal has high expectations of us and wants us to succeed’. However, they are not sufficiently engaged in setting their own goals to improve their learning. Parents concur with the views of their children. They state that there is inconsistency in parent teacher conferencing. The majority of teachers seek information from them in setting goals for improving the academic performance for their children, but not all.

Goals and plans to narrow the gap between the achievement of students in this school and similar schools in the State English language arts tests focuses the mind and drives the activity of the whole 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 proficient.

The school has planned its curriculum flexibly to meet mandated requirements and to promote enjoyment in learning. The focus on the arts to promote creativity and the

development of students' fitness through physical education are strengths. The balanced literacy program generates good data to measure student progress. The focus on developing students as writers through exploring social issues in grades 4 through 5 promotes good learning.

Teachers are held accountable. The new principal has shown steel in dealing with under-performing teachers, but recognizes there is still work to be done. Instruction is planned and differentiated based on students' needs, but is not consistent across all classes. Review evidence demonstrates consistency in planning across grade 4 through 5 classes to develop critical thinking skills.

Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions based on student data are strong features of the school. However, many initiatives implemented by the new principal are at too early a stage of development to evaluate. Based on data that grade 3 students spend too much time catching up what they should have learnt in kindergarten through grade 2, robust and decisive action has been taken to lift the profile of early years' provision. An early year development floor with additional resources and re-allocated staffing, based on students' needs, has been created to drive up standards. The progress of special education students in kindergarten demonstrates the benefit of this strategy. The decision to move a group of boys with challenging behavior out of a class and appoint a male teacher to serve them has paid dividends. Behavior throughout the school has been turned around in a short space of time. Scheduling of common planning time has enabled teams of teachers to meet and use data to realign units and instruction based on students' needs. Scheduling of time for planned independent reading and assessment of students has raised student achievement.

Instructional programs are variable, but improving under the management of change brought about by the new principal. Some lessons excite students and engage them in their learning. Clear and shared objectives, brisk pace, exciting activities and involvement of students in assessing their own performance are typical of such lessons. Students say, 'We love math because decimals relate to our handling of money, and our teachers push us to move up a level with our reading'. However, some instruction lacks sparkle. In such lessons transition from one activity to the next takes too long and the pace of learning slows. Over the past year, students say they have come to feel increasingly safe at school and they have a trusted adult they can turn to with their troubles.

Attendance is high profile. It is the best for an elementary school in District 9. Procedures for tracking and following up absence are robust.

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 is respected, by all stakeholders in the school community, as an effective leader who cares passionately to raise achievement for all students. It is recognized that he has courageously managed some resistance on the part of a few staff members to change the culture of this school. The school runs smoothly on a day-day basis.

The principal inherited the majority of his staff. Teachers recruited by him have been selected for their commitment to special needs students and their specific skills in managing tricky behavior, but above all for their love of children and desire to see each

child reach his or her full potential. However, teachers' skill in using data on appointment is variable.

Professional development is driven by the need to raise achievement in English language arts. There is an emphasis on developing teachers' ability to implement the guided reading program effectively and their skills in conferencing students to raise their achievement in both reading and writing. However, quite understandably due to this emphasis, professional development is not always necessarily aligned to the specific needs of individual teachers. The principal and assistant principals observe lessons frequently and feedback to teachers how they can improve their instructional practice. These observations do not always consistently draw on the connections between instructional practice and learning. There is an effective model of peer observations for modeling and sharing good practice.

The involvement of a range of staff teams to evaluate results and revise plans is a strong feature. Discussion in these teams is robust, but data is not always used as effectively as it could be when making revisions. Effective partnerships with outside bodies are in place to develop students' academic and social goals. Steiner Sports and the Montefiore Clinic partnerships are just two of the many that enrich the learning experience for students and promote their health and fitness.

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 principal has introduced a number of programs, such as guided reading and Read 180 for evaluating individual student's progress in reading throughout the year. However, not all school plans yet include frequent interim goals and effective success criteria to measure outcomes for students. The Comprehensive Education Plan focuses on important goals for improvement, but its evaluative tools to measure the success of initiatives being launched do not link sufficiently to outcomes for students. The principal has taken on the responsibility to monitor and revise too many goals to accelerate student learning himself and has not delegated sufficiently to his assistant principals. The school is not yet able to evaluate the impact of the decisive action it has taken to raise achievement from kindergarten through grade 2, or the impact of the balanced literacy program on standards in English language arts because both initiatives are so new.

Effective comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms, using conference logs, are made to measure the progress of plans and interventions. However, weaknesses remain. For example, it is considered that African students in the English language support classes do better than Hispanic students in the bi-lingual classes, but lack of hard evidence means that the school is well placed to make revisions to its bi-lingual program.

Interim goals are set for special needs students and analysis of performance data is used to further refine strategies used. Analysis of the final outcomes in the 2006 City mathematics tests has led to a revision of the mathematics program which has increased students' achievement in problem solving. The principal is flexible and has the courage to change direction mid course where data shows that strategies may not be as successful as intended. He has successfully taken the majority of the staff with him on his quest to ensure that all students aspire to reach for their full potential.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Benjamin Franklin School (PS 055)	∅	✓	+
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	