



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Bennington School

Public School 76

900 Adee Avenue

Bronx

NY 10469

Principal: Louise Sedotto

Dates of review: October 18 - 20, 2006

Reviewer: Shan Pinna-Griffith

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bennington School has approximately 1000 students between kindergarten and grade 5. It is a very popular school and has been over subscribed for at least the last three years.

The school population comprises 56% Black, 37% Hispanic, 4% White and 3% Asian students, of whom 51% are male and 49% female. Just over 10% of students are English language learners. Attendance, at 93%, is slightly higher than similar and City schools. The percentage of special education students has gradually increased over the last three years, and is currently approximately 5%. Over 82% of the students are Title 1 eligible; this is a higher proportion than in similar and City schools.

The principal has been in this position for three years, having previously worked as an assistant principal at the school and prior to this as a staff development trainer for the local district.

The school is currently undergoing building program to improve academic and recreational facilities.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's leadership is driven by her clear values, vision and high expectations for all staff and students.
- The principal is skilled in sharing and empowering leadership in others at all levels throughout the school.
- The positive school climate and the partnership between staff and students allow high quality learning and teaching to take place.
- There is a range of well developed systems and strategies to monitor the quality of classroom instruction.
- Data is very well used to identify, target and support students, particularly those in need.
- The impact of instruction and other academic services on the students' progress is continually reviewed.
- There is a whole school approach to professional development, linked to school improvement priorities.
- The coaching/mentoring approach used for in-house professional development is effective.
- All staff are involved in ensuring that the school is a safe and secure place for learners.
- There is a very positive partnership with parents

What the school needs to improve

- Develop a whole-school strategic approach for challenge and support for the higher-achieving students, to ensure that a greater percentage of students attain level 4 at the end of grade 5.
- Further develop strategies to monitor the impact of academic intervention staff and paraprofessional support on student achievement.
- Explore ways to give students a voice within the school, actively engaging the students in decision making.
- Develop the current embryonic performing arts provision in the range of curriculum enrichment activities and accessibility to all students.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school.

It is three years since the principal was appointed to Bennington School. She leads a learning community which is successful, purposeful, and committed to excellence in all aspects of its work. School leaders know their school very well. Data is effectively used to inform all aspects of decision-making, including setting goals for students.

The atmosphere is professional but caring, and staff, students and parents are valued individually and collectively. Learning at Bennington is about enjoyment; members of staff are dedicated professionals, students want to learn, and parents are equal partners in this process.

The principal and her leadership team spend much of their time in classrooms, observing teaching and learning, and providing support that is tightly focused on the individual needs of students and staff. The faculty is energetic and committed, with a broad range of experience within the group. The school has an excellent partnership with parents.

All staff members are fully involved in ensuring the school is a safe and secure place for learners. This positive school climate and the partnership between staff and students allow high quality learning and teaching to take place.

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 uses a wide range of assessments and tests to provide teachers and school leaders with as complete a picture as possible of student achievement and progress. This has been developed into a rigorous and continuous assessment process that takes place throughout the school year.

Data is used effectively to identify, target and support classes, grades, subgroups and individual students. This is especially effective in meeting the social, emotional and academic needs of students who face the greatest barriers to learning. The administration uses the June data to map instruction for the following academic year, clustering students with similar needs in the same class to maximize the effectiveness of the targeted support from academic intervention support and paraprofessionals. The school considers its data from State tests with care, but the analysis of the performance of ethnic groups and of gender groups does not clearly lead to a focus on the needs of these groups.

The school's data shows that since 2003, the percentage of students reaching levels 3 and 4 in mathematics has exceeded that of similar and City schools, while the percentage of pupils achieving level 1 has been lower. The school has used its data to determine areas for improvement. For example, following the State test results, the school has accurately identified English language arts as an area for development for all students.

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.

The school is effective in making use of available data to plan next steps for teaching and learning. Teachers receive detailed information at the beginning of each school year of students’ levels, specific abilities and needs in English and mathematics. Students with borderline performance (“slippables” and “pushables”) are identified, to ensure that these students do not fall back a level.

Members of staff are guided and supported in setting goals for students by the administration and their monthly “Fireside Chats” during which student progress is examined in detail. These meetings are now being held separately with the academic intervention services staff to highlight their accountability for their students’ progress. Evidence shows teachers are using a common set of rubrics to assess and feedback to students on their work.

The academic intervention services team has overall responsibility for students with additional needs. It has been instrumental in developing the schools’ intervention programs and these have been successful in supporting students in greatest need of improvement. Students are well supported by academic intervention staff, paraprofessionals and a guidance counselor. The child study team meets weekly to monitor student progress, discuss intervention strategies and make specific referrals to school-based professionals such as speech teachers and psychologists. Students supported by these interventions make good progress and achieve well. The school has a very positive and effective partnership with parents and involves them in all aspects of their children’s education.

Although the school deals well with supporting students who need support, it does not yet have a whole-school strategic approach for challenge and support for the higher-achieving students in all grades, with the aim of having a greater percentage of students attaining level 4 at the end of grade 5.

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 uses data effectively to determine areas for curriculum development. During her first three years in this position, the principal has focused on continuous improvement in English and mathematics. The school has formed a partnership with Teachers’ College. It is now a collaborative community of practice, sharing best practice in literacy and mathematics with a partner school and it is networked with other City schools. Teachers receive support to develop standards in writing through the Teachers’ College Writing Project. Data showed that reading comprehension was an area of special need, and this is now being addressed through the Read Well program. The 100 Books Challenge, which involves students, staff and parents in a focused reading partnership, has generated an air of excitement.

As part of curriculum development, the school has recently developed a partnership with “Education Through Music” and is now in a position to expand student access to a broader range of instruction in the performing arts. The school has correctly identified the need to develop staff confidence in using technology in the classroom. The principal effectively uses the school budget to address development needs. She has created a full-time technology position to support this and has a grant to purchase additional hardware. Initially this project is targeting teachers who are confident and skilled in using technology as role models for colleagues. It is too soon to see the impact of this in students’ performance.

The principal has adopted a flexible but effective approach to staff deployment aimed at improving student achievement. Teachers who are particularly skilled in working with small groups of lower-performing students have been assigned to teach the classes in literacy and mathematics that have been set up for such students. Some staff loop with their students to the next grade, providing continuity of instruction and helping to ensure steady progress from one year to the next. Staff are regularly monitored and held accountable for their performance. Teachers differentiate their planning and delivery of instruction according to the academic needs of the students in their class.

The school has well-developed systems to celebrate student success in attendance, social growth, and academic progress. This is led effectively by the parent coordinator and guidance counselor. A recent initiative is a “Welcome Wagon” where all newly admitted students meet with the cabinet. At present, there is no procedure to give students a stronger voice within the school, such as actively engaging the students in decision making, although this would have the potential to enhance student engagement.

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 is an effective leader, with clear values, vision and high expectations for all staff and students. She is well respected by staff, students and parents. She is skilled in sharing and empowering leadership at all levels throughout the school. Her leadership has ensured that senior staff are focused on building teacher capacity to improve student achievement in a planned and sustainable manner.

The school has been successful in recruiting high caliber teachers and offers them tailored support, such as “buddies,” and high-quality professional development. There is a whole-school approach to professional development linked to school priorities, such as the current focus on literacy supported by the Teachers’ College Writing Project. A coaching and mentoring approach is used for in-house professional development. In this respect the mathematics staff developer and the literacy coach model lessons and agree a timetable for peer coaching, and provide opportunities for teachers to visit other lessons with their coach.

The principal has a good overview of the quality of learning and teaching in all grades throughout the school. School leaders are explicit in their expectations of teachers. They have developed a detailed assessment timetable, reviewed the curriculum map and introduced weekly learning walks to gauge the quality of learning and teaching. Teachers receive feedback from these sessions celebrating their strengths and providing clear guidance on areas for development. The school has well-developed systems for staff to

discuss teaching, learning, and student achievement. Meetings of subject-area and grade-level teachers provide opportunities for staff to share best practices and use data to plan next steps. The child study team monitors the progress of low-achievers, providing intervention prior to referral to special education, which is viewed as a last resort. The school has rightly identified the need to develop strategies to monitor the impact of the academic intervention staff and paraprofessional support on student 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 well developed.

The principal and cabinet prioritize the key issues to address in the Comprehensive Education Plan and evaluate it during the school year. Self-review and reflection are an integral part of the school culture for staff and students. Throughout the school year a variety of staff teams meet regularly to review how successful their plans have been in achieving their stated goals. Discussion at cabinet, academic team, or grade-level staff meetings makes reference to relevant data. Progress of students, measured by outcome, drives the school forward in its continuing efforts to deliver the highest quality learning for all. There is a range of well-developed systems and strategies to monitor the quality of classroom instruction.

Teachers understand the usefulness of continual assessment in planning the next steps in learning for individual, groups and classes. The cross-discipline sessions, where teachers and specialized staff meet to discuss pupils, ensure that academic, social and emotional needs are continually under review, and changes made to interventions if necessary.

The school realigns the curriculum and the way learning is organized to respond to the identified needs of individuals and cohort of students. Summative and formative assessments are used to monitor progress, and currently the school is researching teaching strategies that will take account of students' preferred learning styles.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Bennington School (PS76)	∅	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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