



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Creston School

Public School 079

**125 East 181 Street
Bronx
NY 10453**

Principal: Vera Mitchell

Dates of review: March 12 - 14, 2007

Reviewer: Ted Solow

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Creston School, Public School 79, is a pre-kindergarten through grade 5 school located in the Fordham and Tremont area of the Bronx. There are currently 1039 students enrolled at the school. The ethnic balance is 68.2% Hispanic, 29.1% Black and 2.7% Asian and others. The male to female ratio is 51.2% to 48.8%.

English language learners presently comprise 25.7% of the student body, a much higher proportion than typically found in similar and City schools. Spanish is the main language youngsters and their parents speak at home. They are served in one self-contained kindergarten class and in a pull-out program for all other students in the school. Special education students make up 14% of the population. They are taught in self-contained classes and the resource room. The services provided include physical and occupational therapy, counseling and speech services.

The school currently receives Title 1 funding. The average daily attendance is 92.7% which is higher than similar and City school averages.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is visible about the school, respected as a leader, a good listener and accessible.
- The administrative team focuses on the quality of teaching and learning within a school culture of high expectations for all students.
- The educational program actively engages the students.
- The halls and classrooms are decorated with examples of student work reflecting a wide range of subjects and current units of study.
- Procedures, policies and school rules contribute to a calm, orderly environment.
- Budget decisions support the educational needs of the students.
- A program of intra-school and inter-class visitations is provided for new staff members.
- Analysis of data drives the educational program.
- The professional development program supports the needs of the staff and students.
- The pupil personnel team uses available data to analyze and address the needs of struggling students.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand parental involvement in the educational activities of their children.
- Create more hands-on activities in the science program.
- Assess individual and cohort group data to measure progress for English language learners, special education students and other groups of interest in the school.
- Further expand the activities of the data team to expedite analysis of data.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The principal has been at this school for the past 13 years. She selected her administrative team to support her vision of high expectations for all youngsters. Together they have formed a professional learning community that has moved the school forward and made a positive impact on the entire school community. The teachers, students and parents gave high marks to the positive educational experience delivered at the school.

A strong collegial and collaborative staff work in grade teams to plan and support each other's classroom efforts. Additional assistance is provided by literacy and mathematics coaches, cluster teachers with specific subject specialties and other related service providers. A data team collects and disseminates student data and creates special material designed to support the classroom efforts of the staff. Every student is monitored for performance and progress and teachers are able to get information regarding the abilities and needs of their students. The principal and her cabinet have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for 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 gathers data from State and City examinations, formal and informal assessments, observations of students working and student conferencing notes which enables it to form a realistic picture of each student's performance. In particular, data are gathered in a variety of ways to identify needs and strengths in English language arts and mathematics for each student, class and grade. Teachers use the data to monitor and track student progress closely. The results from the regular reading assessments are used to establish levels and set benchmarks in order to monitor each student's progress.

The school analyzes available data to gain an accurate understanding about the progress of English language learners and special education students. At this time the information is not broken down in detail to show the relative performance of ethnic groups and boys and girls, especially those who are also special education students, English language learners, and who may belong to a different group of interest. The principal has begun to tackle this issue by planning a database to disaggregate data by other sub-groups.

The administrative team reviews its past performance to observe how well the school compares with similar schools in the district and throughout the City. Individual, class and grade results are reviewed to monitor the progress of individual students, and also holdovers, those receiving intervention services and special education students moving to general education classes.

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 collaborative culture is at the core of this school. The principal establishes goals for the school’s overall improvement and details them in the Comprehensive Educational Plan. Teachers meet with the administrative team to set objective, measurable goals designed to move students up a level in English language arts and mathematics, and enabling English language learners to progress from beginner to proficiency levels in English. Grade teams meet regularly to plan and develop strategies, and set timeframes to achieve these goals.

Every student knows their reading test score and those in grades 3 through 5 know their reading and mathematics levels. The students have established long-term and interim goals and are able to communicate them to each other and to teachers and parents. Student goals are posted in every classroom and are revised as and when necessary during conferencing sessions. All goal setting and planning activities focus on student improvement. Teachers monitor students’ progress closely as they take the steps to achieve their personal goals.

Struggling students are recommended for academic intervention services by their teachers after an analysis of current reading and mathematics data, teacher observations and assessments and holdover status. All services are provided by staff with subject area expertise during the extended school day. Every six weeks student progress is reviewed by the pupil personnel committee and revisions are made as needed.

Many parents do not speak English and so find it difficult to involve themselves fully in their children’s education. The school makes every effort to translate all notices and meetings in order to share the high expectations it has for their children. Parents are invited to an orientation conference each September to discuss the school’s goals for their children. This is followed up during the year with additional information including monthly calendars, progress notes, returned tests and other class and school notices, sent home via the ‘back pack’. Teachers routinely send letters that explains class goals and promotion criteria. Bilingual staff members provide translation services when required and will visit homes when necessary. The Spanish speaking parent coordinator provides a program to train parents on how they can help their children at home with their studies. Parents appreciate what the school does and especially the ‘open door policy’ of the principal, assistant principal and the teachers who are accessible to the 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 follows the curricula mandated by the City and uses the Balanced Literacy program and leveled books across the grades and Everyday Mathematics to do this. Elements from Balanced Literacy support the core curriculum in science and social studies which are both aligned to the State scope and sequence guidance. The mathematics and literacy coaches support the efforts of the classroom teachers by offering subject area and instructional expertise. Grade teams meet twice a week during common planning periods

to prepare monthly curriculum calendars in English language arts and mathematics and to develop rubrics, review student work, and align instructional objectives. Grade and class activities and instructional strategies are also discussed at these planning sessions. A member of the administrative team and other services providers attend the meetings for support, guidance and to keep informed about the educational process in each grade.

Differentiated instructional techniques are used proficiently throughout the school to meet the needs of students. Struggling students are provided with extra support by the teacher and other support personnel. All teachers are accountable for improving student outcomes. English as a second language teachers align their instruction to the grade when students are pulled out for instruction.

The business manager is highly effective in managing the budget and keeping the principal informed about current available resources. Subsequent decisions have led to lower class size and the hiring of six part-time teachers with specific subject expertise to support the curriculum and assist new staff members. Scheduling procedures have led to two common planning periods each week for all grades and these are used efficiently to discuss strategies that promote student achievement. Data is used to make decisions on future grade and class organizations and the planning for subject development.

Most instruction is geared toward keeping students engaged and challenged although there are fewer opportunities for students to learn science through regular hands-on practical activities. Students receive direct instruction, work in groups and independently, and meet with their teachers to share and discuss issues concerning their class work. Students commented that they liked the way the teachers conduct their classes and they are rarely bored. Students know and trust a member of the staff.

Student attendance is a high priority and is monitored closely. Any unexplained or irregular attendance triggers immediate action by the school. Attendance procedures are well known to students and parents.

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 as a leader who listens, encourages risk taking and who is accessible to the school community. Together, the administrative team has steadily moved the school forward. Parents, students and staff praise the principal's efforts in successfully improving school safety and for promoting a caring atmosphere throughout. Rules and regulations are known and followed and contribute to the orderly environment and day-to-day smooth running of the school. The school is clean and the halls and classrooms are richly decorated with examples of current student work

When hiring new staff, the school looks for people who like working with children, who have good subject area expertise, the capacity to use data to plan instructional practices and who demonstrate teaching abilities. There are regular formal and informal procedures to observe teachers. Classrooms are visited daily by a member of the administrative team and written and verbal feedback is given in a timely fashion. Staff considers the feedback from these visits an important part of their professional development. Professional development activities begin at grade meetings. Coaches assist staff in identifying needs and plan appropriate strategy building sessions. The Comprehensive

Educational Plan lists professional goals for the year. Teachers are being trained in using the Wilson method of reading instruction as part of a school-wide initiative which is the core of the professional development for this school year. Most professional development activities take place at the school and are conducted by coaches, administrators, instructional technology specialists, teachers and other service providers. There is a plan in place should a specific need arise, whereby, revisions can be made to the program. Weekly grade meetings give teachers the opportunity to discuss curriculum and review the progress of their students. An intra-school and inter-class visitation program is in place to allow new teachers to observe best practices. All grade teams work collaboratively and support each other by sharing strategies, techniques and lesson planning ideas.

The school has developed supportive partnerships with community organizations that help it to achieve its academic and social goals. The Good Shepherd program conducts after-school opportunities in academic enrichment and recreation that includes sports, cultural and educational activities. Some students join Community Change, which develops projects to improve the local neighborhood, and are given a stipend for their participation. There is also a Saturday academic enrichment program and holiday sessions conducted at the school. The school has developed many co-curricular activities with outside partners, such as an 'Artist in Residence – Studio in the School' program, a band supported by a licensed music teacher, an inter-scholastic athletic program, a fitness awareness program and an asthma self-help group.

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 Comprehensive Educational Plan outlines clear practices and policies for evaluating the school's progress towards meeting its goals. The plan is prepared by the school leadership team and is reviewed periodically for its effectiveness throughout the school year. Every six weeks data from interim assessments are used to review the progress of at-risk students. However, currently the progress of different groups of students is not used to evaluate its work effectively. The principal has begun to tackle this issue with her data team to see how this data will help teachers align more closely curriculum and instruction to all students' needs.

Princeton Review assessments in English language arts and mathematics provide current data which guides instructional practices. Student levels are measured against previously established benchmarks to determine progress. These assessments lead to revisions and adjustments in programs and plans in each class and across the grades.

Data generated by the City, State and school assessments are used to monitor progress towards school, class and grade goals. Reassessment of goals is explored at grade meetings with coaches, specialists and cluster teachers to see if the needs of the students are being met. If there is a disparity, the principal has the resources to reassign staff and allocate resources to meet the new target goals.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

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| SCHOOL NAME: The Creston School (PS 079) | ∅ | ✓ | + |
| Quality Score | | X | |

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| 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.

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| 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 | |

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| 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 | |