



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Sheila Mencher Van Cortlandt School

Public School/Middle School 095

**3961 Hillman Avenue
Bronx
NY 10463**

Principal: Elizabeth Lopez

**Dates of review: May 17 - 18, 2007
Reviewers: Ken Bryan and Alvin Jeffs**

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Shelia Mencher School (PS/MS 095) is a large elementary/middle school serving 1387 students from grades kindergarten through 8. The school's ethnic composition is 60% Hispanic, 26% Black, 7% Asian and others, and 7% White. The proportion of students eligible for Title 1 funding is 76%, which is higher than the average for similar and City schools. The number of special education students is 15%. Eighteen percent of students are English language learners, whose first language is Spanish. The school receives a small number of recent immigrant students from the Dominican Republic, Ghana and Jamaica. The student attendance rate is 91.7% which is in line with similar and City-wide school averages.

The school's faculty consists of a large number of fully licensed teachers and there is a balance of recently qualified and veteran staff. Staff mobility can be high as the school encourages career development and progression. PS/MS 095 is proud of its affiliation with Columbia University's Teachers' College professional development program and with Dream Yard, who provide a fully integrated arts program.

PS/MS 095 is an empowerment school. Empowerment schools have more flexibility to make decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is respected by all members of the school community and she demonstrates excellent academic and operational leadership.
- The school gathers and uses data effectively to set challenging goals for all its students, which includes its 'at risk' groups.
- Excellent systems are in place to compare the performance and progress of individual students, classes, grades and other groups within the school.
- The schools cabinet is an effective group that provides excellent instructional and professional support.
- There is a comprehensive program of professional development which effectively supports the needs of individual teachers.
- The curriculum is very effectively planned and delivered within a culture of collaboration and teamwork.
- The teachers know and respect the students and they respond very diligently to their academic and personal needs.
- The school runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis and the classrooms are quiet, well-organized and purposeful learning areas.

What the school needs to improve

- Raise levels of confidence and competence within the faculty to analyze and interpret data effectively in relation to level 2 students.
- Raise the levels of achievement for English language learners.
- Focus upon raising the level of student attendance by improving parental involvement.
- Make effective use of data to improve the provision for the highest achieving students in each grade.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

Collaboration, respect and care lie at the heart of PS 095's well-organized learning community. The principal and her cabinet effectively manage the school through excellent systems to provide rigorous academic and personal guidance. The teachers know and respect the students through personal guidance and the effective use of data, including periodic assessments that are developing well. The faculty is fully supported through a comprehensive and robust professional development program and the curriculum is carefully planned through collaboration and teamwork. There is an open culture of peer support amongst the faculty, overseen by the principal and her cabinet.

The school's principal is highly respected by all members of the school community and she demonstrates good capacity to effect change. The school runs very smoothly and the classrooms and hallways are very well organized and clad with excellent displays of students' work which reflect care and skill. The school's interdisciplinary approach to curriculum planning and the integration of an arts program ensure that classes are stimulating and vibrant places.

The school's self evaluation process has clearly identified priorities for development in the use of data and, through the dedication of the faculty and the decisive management of the principal and administrators, the school is well placed to move forward.

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 data extremely well for individual students, constituent groups within the school and for whole-school goal setting. There is clear evidence that the principal, her cabinet and the faculty use the data extensively and systematically to differentiate learning and set measurable and objective goals. The effective use of extremely detailed and well organized data binders is significant. Through the excellent work of the Empowerment School Initiative (ESI) team this year, each teacher is provided with the mechanism to track student progress rigorously. This is a developing feature and it requires more time to be firmly embedded.

The principal and the cabinet rigorously scrutinize the data for trends and variations over time in relation to individual students, classes, grades and within and between content areas. For example, a Saturday academy has been provided to address the needs of low performing 6th graders. Aggregated whole-school data is carefully compared with similar school and City-wide statistics to determine the degree of improvement; PS 95 vigorously analyzes its performance in relation to past performance and other schools. At the classroom level, the faculty carefully and rigorously set challenging goals for individual students and short term variations in performance are immediately addressed through

one-to-one conferencing and formative assessments. The use of student portfolios is a very strong feature as it is the vehicle for 'grow and glow' discussions with the students.

The school vigorously uses the data to identify specific groups within the school, including those 'at risk' students in immediate need of short and medium term improvement. The analysis of the item or raw score data for the level 2 students is very detailed and consistently used across the school. A good example of the flexibility of the school's systems is the way it has developed robust strategies for providing detailed data on its English language learner and special education students as it targets its cohort of students performing below grade level. The ESI team carefully analyzes the data and it is central to implementing intervention services. The relative performance of the various sub-groups is less well developed. Ethnicity is only considered where additional programs are determined by English speaking proficiency and further use of the data is required to set goals for the highest achieving students and attention is not regularly paid to the performance and progress of boys and girls.

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 Sheila Mencher School sets goals very effectively through a systematic process involving all constituent members of the school. This high level of collaboration is a well established process. Challenging goals, based upon data, are set for individual students, classes, grades and content areas. The school rigorously sets demanding goals for system-wide improvement based upon time-related comparative data. These objective and measurable goals are very well communicated to individual students and their parents and to teachers. The school has an embedded culture of continuous school improvement based upon the available data. The faculty can clearly articulate the relationship between data and goal setting for individual students and the objective and measurable goals for groups of students. The learning objectives of special education and English language learners are clearly set through the rigorous use of data.

There is a very robust system for the identification and tracking of 'at risk' students in greatest need of improvement. There is a very determined approach to the improvement of vulnerable students using item analysis, with a considerable amount of effort and resources being afforded to students performing below grade level. The principal and her cabinet have made systemic changes to the school to meet the needs of its special education students; by assigning the most successful teachers to the neediest children, reducing class sizes and through inclusion. The school vigorously shares its high expectations with the parents through a mixture of meetings and other forms of communication. Consultations and other conversations with the parents are frequent and the teachers use mailing and telephone calls to ensure that that student progress is fully articulated on a regular basis. The parents' association is a very effective group.

The importance of clearly defined goals based upon a range of data lies at the heart of the school. The communication of high expectations is clearly evident and this is an authentic and intrinsic feature as goals linked to improving student performance drive the school.

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 can clearly demonstrate the links between data, State standards and the mandated curriculum. The curriculum binders visibly show the integration of the mandated curriculum through the use of excellent interdisciplinary themes, particularly within English language arts and the social studies program. Through constant evaluations by the assistant principals and the coaches, modifications to the program are rigorously applied linked to the professional development program. A mixture of teacher-generated diagnostic, formative and summative data continually informs this process as the teachers are held highly accountable to provide differentiated instruction. The faculty systematically uses reading scores and other interim raw score data to differentiate within homogeneously grouped classes. Portfolios of students’ work provide detailed qualitative additional information.

The principal and her cabinet allocate the budget very imaginatively to meet the needs of the student and the teachers. The schedule is cleverly adjusted to meet the needs of special education and English language learners through the successful use of small class sizes, inclusion and blocked instructional periods.

The students are fully engaged in the classroom and they are very self-motivated. They are consistently on-task, and when spoken to, they clearly articulate learning objectives, personal data, the importance of the portfolios and goals. The relationship between the faculty and the students is excellent. The teachers know the students very well and they make every effort to meet their personal and academic needs. The classrooms are consistently well organized and the excellent displays on the walls throughout the school reflect hard work, meticulous care and skill. The use of exemplar materials is particularly effective.

The school is seeking to raise attendance and actively challenges student absence and celebrates good attendance. Sixteen school aids are assigned to the grades to follow-up absences and the parent coordinator is very effective at overseeing the communication with 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 well developed.

The principal and her cabinet select highly qualified staff on the basis of their expertise and upon their capacity for further professional development, which includes the potential to use data effectively.

Professional development is differentiated for all staff and the teachers’ needs are determined by classroom data and the many frequent informal and formal observations by the principal, coaches and cabinet. Professional development opportunities are determined by observations, analysis of data, through teacher surveys and other needs assessments. As a consequence of a very collaborative approach to continuing professional development, peer and self evaluation is regular and intrinsically linked to the

support mechanisms involving coaches, staff developers and the cabinet. All teachers are kept well informed of the school's goals and data, as they continually modify the programs and request further professional assistance. Common prep time and 'lunch and learn' sessions are effectively used for grade and content planning with the foci being data analysis, self-evaluation and improvements to instruction. The principal is highly respected by all members of the school community and the school functions very effectively on a day-to-day basis.

The school has excellent relationships with external organizations which significantly enhance the education of the students. For example Dream Yard artists work with the students and also assist the teachers to integrate the artwork into the curriculum. Another collaboration is with Pace University which provides the school with a constant supply of newly qualified teachers. The successful partnership with Junior Achievement is a high school collaboration which provides the students with an opportunity to understand economics.

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 school plans within a clear cycle of goal setting and review based upon the continuous on-going gathering and analysis of data. Baseline, mid-line and end-line data is continually reviewed with particular attention being given to reading, writing and mathematics. The assistant principals and the coaches meet each week to evaluate the data provided by the faculty and from the numerous walkthroughs. The cabinet and instructional team meetings are conferences where modifications and revisions of the school's goals occur on a regular basis, based upon interim diagnostic assessments. Comparisons and the analysis of new data are constantly being reviewed which leads to the initiation of intervention programs such as Wilson and Voyager. The school vigorously compares its performance with other local schools to ensure its goals and plans are well-focused and implemented rigorously.

The school self-evaluation process is developing through the establishment of a clear timetable of review involving all of the school's stakeholders. Currently, the school does not systematically evaluate the impact of its school improvement strategies on a regular basis. Medium and long-term goals are revisited monthly by the school leadership team who modify the Comprehensive Education Plan. The plan is a living and constantly modified document, which is continually and collaboratively informed by the available data from the classrooms. Strengths are identified and weaknesses are prioritized by this process and the cabinet disseminates information effectively for all constituent groups within the school. The school's interim plans and assessments flexibly inform modifications to the plan. School self-evaluation is effectively coordinated by the cabinet and the instructional and ESI teams who gather data from the faculty.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Sheila Mencher School (PS 095)	∅	✓	+
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