



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Helen Keller School**

**Public School 153**

**650 Baychester Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10475**

**Principal: MaryAnn Milano**

**Dates of review: October 30 - 31, 2006**

**Reviewer: Helen Donnellan**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Public School 153, Helen Keller School, serves nearly 600 students from kindergarten to grade 4. Students come from the local neighborhood and beyond the region. As a result, some students travel for more than an hour to and from school. Fifty percent of students are Title 1 eligible. There are 63.6% Black students, 26.5% Hispanic, 4.6% Asian and 4.6% White.

Just over 10% are special education students and there are 2.5% English language learners. Special education students are fully included in school life, with mixed programs for discrete special education classes as well as inclusion in mainstream classes. Twelve autistic students from the specialized school within the building are also integrated into mainstream classes. Students with physical disabilities and limited mobility are educated within the school, with some special resource areas for their needs. In each grade there is a class for gifted students.

The school is well resourced, including a good number of fixed and portable computers in classrooms and the computer suite. The school's teaching, support and guidance staff work with community based and other support services organizations to provide integrated services. These organizations support curriculum and teaching development, as well as students' achievement.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Effective leadership of the school means that the school runs smoothly, safely and is an active learning environment.
- The principal and assistant principals' classroom observations are used to monitor teaching and inform future professional development.
- Students are well behaved, co-operative and happy to be at PS 153.
- There is an integrated program for students' academic and social needs, with a range of specialist staff and facilities for all students.
- Special education and gifted students are well integrated into the life of school.
- Data is gathered systematically and used effectively to track student progress and inform teaching plans.
- Teaching is differentiated by what students are asked to do, rather than simply by the level of the support provided.
- Stimulating instruction engages students and involves them actively in learning.
- Expectations of student academic achievement are high and communicated explicitly to students, who are clear about what they are learning and why.

### What the school needs to improve

- Increase the analysis of the performance of various groups within the school, including ethnicity and gender, to ensure that all benefit equally.
- Simplify teachers' planning procedures to avoid duplication and provide an integrated structure that reduces the administration burden for teachers.
- Monitor the use of paraprofessionals to ensure that their time is used to support learning and teaching at all times to accelerate students' progress.
- Continue to work with parents to involve them in their children's education.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a well-developed school.**

The principal ensures that PS 153 provides a safe and secure learning environment where stimulating instruction challenges students and supports academic achievement. This reflects the school mission of the pursuit of excellence. There is no complacency.

The staff know the students very well individually. Statistical data gives objective information about students' learning, thus providing a fuller picture of each student. Expectations of students and staff are high and the principal provides valuable support to promote these expectations. The use of formal and informal assessment data is central to tracking progress for each student and planning for improvement.

Team work between teaching, support and guidance staff is a particular strength of the school. This is particularly evident in special education, where designated staff collaborate with mainstream school staff to provide integrated services to the students. Continuous professional development is well established in the day-to-day life of the school.

### 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 is systematic in gathering detailed data on the performance and progress of its students. Teachers carry out formal assessments and monthly evaluations in English language arts and mathematics; observations are recorded to add to assessment data. School evaluations of each student are carried out each month and the information is processed without delay, so that both teaching and learning issues can be explored and addressed. Staff also maintain individual student records, so that information reflects academic, social and personal development.

The principal and her cabinet have established tools and structures for analyzing and presenting data which make clear the progress made by each student. Where data indicates slowing of progress, specific intervention is put in place to support the student or students affected.

Comparative data with the performance of other schools comes from the school record card rather than being produced within the school. This reflects the emphasis on tracking individual student progress rather than comparing classes or groups of students. Students' views are taken into account through the student council, which also gives students opportunities to develop citizenship awareness through the election process.

**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’s systematic plans for improvement are driven by the use of data. Strategic goals based on evidence link to the principal and assistant principals’ objectives, which are then communicated to teachers at class level. Data is well used to provide information about each student’s progress and identify the need for intervention to support learning. Parent-teacher conferences to discuss each student’s progress take place three times each year where data, informal class assessments and running records provide evidence of student progress. Teachers hold weekly grade level meetings where revisions to curriculum plans are made, using formal and informal data about student progress within each class. Difficulties or slowing of progress are detected through informal record keeping, and interventions are made promptly to overcome these. Portfolios of student work are widely used in conferences, so that decisions are based on wider evidence than test results alone.

Staff working with special education students also use assessment data from other professionals, such as speech and language therapists, alongside academic assessments to provide a holistic picture of the student, their learning needs and progress. The academic intervention service team meets weekly to review and update interventions for every student it supports. Data is used to identify gifted students, who are taught within a separate class in each grade. Ongoing tracking of these students by their class teachers ensures that challenge is sustained and progress continues. All teachers adapt their teaching plans to reflect the most recent assessment data.

Expectations are high for all students and explicit messages reinforce students’ confidence in themselves as learners. Fifty percent of English language learners achieved levels 3 and 4 in English language arts assessment in 2005, compared with a figure of 28.9% for similar schools. Mathematics achievement for the same group is 14% higher and compares favorably. The parent coordinator ensures that parents are well informed through workshops and regular newsletter updates. However, some parents would like more specific information about their children’s achievement.

The principal plans to refine the use of data further, through even closer monitoring of student progress at an individual level, to show the value added to each student’s learning over time in 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.**

Teachers are actively involved in establishing the content of the curriculum, which is discussed at grade level meetings. In these, data provides evidence for changes to ensure that the curriculum matches the students’ needs. Participating in whole school review of the curriculum two years ago led to teachers having ownership of the curriculum. Ongoing review is now carried out by a small team of

teachers, who meet monthly to continue this work and communicate information to their colleagues. Data is extensively used by teachers and senior staff to plan and monitor the impact of programs and intervention, but the school is keen to refine their practice further. The budget is carefully used to support students' learning, and is linked to the school's plans for improvement. Staff are deployed well to make the most of strengths.

Teachers plan how they will adjust their teaching to match students' needs using a variety of formats, some of which result in teachers replicating aspects of their plans and adding to their workload. The school administration recognizes this and intends to review existing planning procedures in order to provide a single, integrated planning framework structure to make planning more manageable for teachers. Teachers are held accountable for their students' progress against their goals through discussions, scrutiny of students' portfolios and teachers' planning, and observations in the classroom.

During some lessons, teachers do not maximize the contribution of additional staff in the classroom. Opportunities for students to be independent in their learning are sometimes missed due to close supervision of students. At other times, some support staff are passive in classes and not actively contributing to either learning or teaching. The principal and assistant principals are committed to monitoring this, to ensure that the valuable resource of the support staff team is used even more effectively.

Students are engaged and active in their learning. They apply previously learned strategies showing confidence and independent learning. They behave well in classes and when moving around the school, so learning is seldom affected by unacceptable behavior. The guidance and support staff are recognized as contributing to the positive relationships that students have with staff. Students feel confident offering support to adults, saying, 'It can be confusing for new teachers at first, we've been here longer and are here to help them too.'

School absence is dealt with promptly and issues related to this are addressed with students and their families.

**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.**

Staff, parents and students appreciate that the principal runs the school smoothly and makes her expectations clear to adults and students.

She takes into account the preferences and strengths of employees when making decisions about staff positions. She combines this with her knowledge of staff, which is gained through formal and informal observations. The move of a former grade 1 teacher to a kindergarten class has raised expectations for the kindergarten students, as the teacher knows the skills and knowledge needed for grade 1. Expectations are made clear to staff throughout the year, through the structures for professional development and support with internal and external colleagues.

The culture of sharing professional learning between staff is well established. Newly recruited teachers have a 'buddy' teacher as a mentor, which provides support during the induction period. All staff give feedback to their colleagues about meetings and training

they attend. This sharing of professional development deepens the impact of the training provided. Learning walks between and across grades provide valuable opportunities for good practices to be shared.

The principal is well respected by staff, students and parents, especially for her expectations of excellence for all students and ongoing professional development for staff. Effective leadership is modeled by leaders, when working with groups of staff, parents and other community based organizations. Professional development does not currently provide opportunities for teachers to strengthen their leadership skills.

The school has effective partnerships with guidance counselors, wider support staff and psychology services to enhance student support within the school. Their after school program provides additional learning support for students, to supplement learning in lessons.

**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.**

There is no place for complacency at this successful school, where staff strive to raise students' achievement and the quality of their own teaching. The process to review the Comprehensive Education Plan is driven by performance data. The first part of the review is by the school leadership team. Following this review, the principal and assistant principals revise and update the plan to reflect the priorities for the coming year.

Data from standardized assessments is supplemented by teachers' running records of individual student performance and used as the basis for changes made to short- and long-term planning. The principal knows that the use of data is instrumental in the school's success.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Helen Keller School (PS 153)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>

\* 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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			<b>X</b>
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.		<b>X</b>	
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X