



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Juan Ponce de Leon School**

**Public School 161**

**628 Tinton Avenue**

**Bronx**

**NY 10455**

**Principal: Pablo LaSalle**

**Dates of review: January 30 - 31, 2007**

**Reviewer: Chip Morrison**

# Content of the report

## **Part 1: The School Context**

Information about the school

## **Part 2: Overview**

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

## **Part 3: Main Findings**

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

## **Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Juan Ponce de Leon School, Public School 161, is a small elementary school in the South Bronx currently serving 485 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. Approximately 78% of students are Hispanic and 21% Black, with small numbers of Asian and White students. About 20% are classified as English language learners. Twenty-seven percent of the total enrolment are special education students.

The school receives Title I funding, with approximately 83% of the students eligible. Average attendance, at 92%, is the same as that for similar schools and slightly below the City average of 93%. Student stability is high. Most students who enroll in pre-kindergarten or kindergarten stay at the school through grade 5.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school makes good use of data from City and State assessments and a broad range of interim assessments in English language arts.
- The school takes a value-added approach to the analysis of student progress, especially in literacy.
- Classroom teachers have a strong sense of what is expected of students by the end of the year and work hard to meet these goals for individual students.
- Through its involvement with the Reading First program, the school has developed a sophisticated, research-based early literacy program.
- There is a strong school-wide emphasis on literacy and having students read extensively at their independent reading level.
- The school's dual-language program in English and Spanish provides a research-based approach to the growth of literacy in both languages.
- The school's academic support teams bring a broad range of relentless problem-solving strategies to bear in helping students with the most challenging needs.
- The school has been especially effective at providing supplementary academic support services for its English language learners and special education students.
- The principal is an experienced manager who makes especially good use of available financial, physical, and human resources.
- Instructional leaders pay close attention to what is going on in classrooms, visiting classrooms frequently and giving focused and useful feedback.

### What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop value-added analysis of available data on the academic growth of groups and subgroups.
- Evaluate the relative effectiveness of different classroom configurations, to learn what works well and what may need to be changed.
- Extend the process of setting specific, measurable, challenging, and time-bound interim goals for improvement to mathematics, other subject areas and whole-school development.
- Continue to improve instruction, especially in mathematics, with a particular emphasis on thoughtful classroom discourse, differentiation of instruction, and checking for understanding.
- Further develop opportunities for professional development, to involve all staff.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

Since coming to Public School 161 eleven years ago, the principal has assembled and retained a dedicated staff of education professionals. With their help, he has gradually built up an academic program, climate and culture formed specifically to meet the needs of the children and families the school serves.

A majority of students remain at the school from kindergarten through grade 5, and thus benefit from the cumulative effects of the school's instructional programs. Although it has a large population of special education students and English language learners, the school has seen steady growth in test scores in English language arts, mathematics, and science. Students receive especially high scores in Spanish-language literacy.

### 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, with well-developed features.**

The school makes effective use of existing student performance data to identify academic needs and track progress over time for individual students, grade-level cohorts, and other relevant subgroups, especially in literacy, both Spanish and English. In addition to data from the State testing programs, the school uses a wide range of high-quality, research-based literacy assessments.

At the classroom level, teachers maintain assessment binders for English language arts. These contain careful documentation of individual student learning through a combination of test score reports, student work, running records, and conference notes. Also, writing portfolios are maintained for each student, and these are passed from one grade level to the next. The school has also begun to develop a consistent way of collecting school-wide data on the quality of student writing.

The literacy coach and her colleagues have developed an exemplary system for tracking the value-added performance of individual students and grade-level cohorts over time, as a means of getting a clear picture of the impact that instruction is having on students on almost a daily basis, regardless of student starting points. The next step is to extend this model to mathematics, and eventually other subject areas. The principal pays close attention to data that shows how students perform in comparison to students in similar schools. He frequently visits high-performing schools to learn from their best practices. There is less emphasis on the analysis of data by other group criteria, to assess the relative performance of the range of groups represented in the school.

**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.**

There is a strong commitment to helping each student improve academically, regardless of barriers. While the overall goal is to have all students meeting or exceeding State standards, the day-to-day focus is on identifying where individual students are and then targeting instruction to those specific needs. Goals and plans tend to focus on the school as a whole, and how work with individual students can help to achieve overall goals identified in the school’s Comprehensive Education Plan.

To help meet identified needs, students receive a full range of academic support services. These include one-on-one and small-group tutoring during the school day, during the 50 minute extended-day period held three times each week, and in the after-school programs. A Saturday academy is in the planning stage. There is a successful emphasis on getting special education students and English language learners to participate in the extended day.

Expectations for student growth are clearly conveyed to students and their parents in various ways. In addition to the mandated parent-teacher conferences, open houses are held twice a year during which parents are invited into student classrooms to discuss in detail what the expectations are and what they can do to expand learning at home. Parent input is also sought in order to develop, evaluate and revise plans. The school provides numerous opportunities to engage parents in the life of the school, including organizing workshops that provide skills and strategies for parents to aid their children in their academic and social growth. Parents are happy with the school, praising the quality of instruction, school safety, and support for special education students.

The general goal of helping all students grow, no matter what their starting points, drives the everyday activities of teachers. Teachers meet on a regular basis to discuss student progress at the class, group and individual level in order to plan next steps and goals.

**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.**

Through adoption of standardized curricula for English language arts and mathematics, school leaders have been largely successful in ensuring basic coverage of the tested curriculum in a way that is consistent from one classroom to the next. Under the guidance and support of a knowledgeable and skillful literacy coach, the school has developed an especially strong early literacy program. The school has also developed a successful Spanish-English dual-language program that is currently offered as an option from kindergarten through grade 4. This is intended to be extended to grade 5 in 2007-2008. The program, in combination with expert early literacy instruction, is having an increasingly positive impact for both English-dominant and Spanish-dominant speaking students.

Although teachers are for the most part capable and well-trained, in the absence of a mathematics coach, instruction in mathematics does not receive the same level of support

that the early literacy program enjoys. Hiring of a high-caliber mathematics coach is a priority for the school. The content of mathematics lessons often revolves around students doing a series of short-answer problems in workbooks, and the work is not always differentiated to challenge the more advanced students in the class.

Generally speaking, classrooms are well organized, with plenty of resources, including computers and classroom libraries. The workshop model for lessons is implemented consistently in most classrooms. Students are for the most part well behaved, on task, and intellectually engaged. A considerable amount of professional development resources have been invested in helping teachers with differentiation, questioning strategies, and accountable talk. However, these skills are not yet well established throughout the school.

The principal is an especially skillful manager of the budget in support of student learning. He puts the school's substantial funding sources to good use in purchasing resources for teachers, reducing class size, funding of three additional full-time providers of academic intervention services, and hiring two science teachers to extend science instruction into all classrooms. Considerable investments have also been made in technology, with new computers in every classroom. Record-keeping functions in the school library are also in the process of being automated, in order to strengthen the school's capacity to collect and analyze data on student reading habits.

Teachers are attentive to students' personal development. A full array of services, including counseling and social work outreach, is available for students in need. Academic intervention team and pupil personnel team members use a wide range of professional expertise, an intimate knowledge of children and their families, and a relentless dedication to find solutions to even the most difficult academic, social-emotional, and health-related problems. There is a special emphasis on trying to solve children's problems with the school's own resources before, as a last resort, referring them for formal evaluation for special education services.

Attendance is not a serious issue in this school, but is nevertheless rigorously pursued. Incentives, such as award assemblies, breakfast with the principal and class certificates, are firmly established and progress is evaluated and reviewed with the school attendance committee.

**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 school has managed to attract and retain a dedicated staff of experienced professionals with many years of service at the school. Only one new teacher has been hired in the past two years. As a result, the school benefits from the cumulative effects of the investments that have been made in professional development over the years, including investment in training teachers in data-driven instruction.

This is especially evident in the early literacy program, where funding from a Reading First grant, which was sought specifically to address identified needs in reading achievement, has resulted in a high level of professional expertise in the development of reading skills, and the early detection and prevention of reading failure. Although all teachers have been trained on the mathematics curriculum, on-site coaching support for mathematics instruction is not nearly as strong as it is for literacy.

The principal, two assistant principals, and other members of the instructional leadership team regularly observe classrooms, both formally and informally. Different members of the team have developed checklists for structuring classroom observations; however, the development of a more consistent framework for discussing and monitoring instructional quality on a school-wide basis has yet to be established.

Teachers meet formally at least once each month to review results and plan instruction. Teachers also meet informally on a more regular basis in specialist groups. For example, the dual-language teachers meet regularly with each other, as do the teachers in the collaborative team teaching classrooms. However, the school is still in the process of developing a school-wide professional learning community that fully and actively involves all faculty members, including specialists and paraprofessionals.

The principal is well respected, has a particularly friendly way of interacting with the students, and therefore has many admirers among them. During his eleven-year tenure, he has managed to bring about significant changes, including improving the school climate and increasing staff collegiality. The school runs smoothly. Students are generally well behaved in the classroom and during transitions.

The school has numerous effective partnerships with outside organizations designed to enrich learning experiences beyond the core academic programs. These include partnerships with the National Dance Institute, Studio in a School, Music Outreach, the New York City Ballet, and the Boy Scouts, which enrich the curriculum and add to students' personal as well as academic development.

**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.**

As noted above, teachers and instructional leaders use a range of formal and informal assessments on a regular basis to monitor student progress toward year-end goals. School-wide goal-setting, through the mandated Comprehensive Education Plan, takes place annually. The school leadership team, including a core group of parents, is actively involved in this process, although the plan does not have interim goals against which to measure progress. Teachers and instructional leaders are well aware of the State-mandated adequate yearly progress goals, and are especially focused on monitoring the progress of English language learners and special needs students.

Regular progress monitoring is especially well developed in the early literacy program, where frequent benchmark assessments and progress monitoring are standard components and reflect state-of-the-art, research-based best practices. The assessment binders that teachers maintain for language arts at every grade level provide additional documentation of interim progress toward goals. Action is taken in response to new information to ensure that interventions and programs are relevant and helpful, and that students are appropriately placed within them. The school has not yet used its rich data set on student performance to investigate the differential impact that the collaborative team teaching classrooms, dual-language classrooms, and English-only classrooms have on the development of reading skills in English.



## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Juan Ponce de Leone School [PS 161]</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