



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The School of International Cultures

Public School 179

110 East 140 Street

Bronx

NY 10454

Principal: Sherry Font-Williams

Dates of review: January 24 – 25, 2007

Reviewer: Veronica Young

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 179, The School of International Cultures, is a small neighborhood elementary school in the south Bronx, educating students from pre-kindergarten through 5th grade. It is now in its fifth year of operation, and in its second with a full contingent of classes, and shares its building with two other elementary schools, one being a District 75 special education school. The other school has a similar population, but Public School 179 students come from homes with even numbers and students from homes with odd numbers attend the other school. The accommodation for Public School 179, therefore, is cramped and facilities such as the gymnasium are shared with the other schools.

The school currently caters for 365 children of whom almost 5% have special education needs and just over 18% are English language learners. It has 98% Title 1 funding. Over 77% students are Hispanic and over 22% are Black, with less than 1% being Native American or White. Attendance is above the city average, at nearly 94%. Although the principal has been in the school since its inception, as assistant principal, interim principal or principal, only 36% teaching staff have been in the school for more than two years and fewer than 24% have been teaching for over five years.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is highly respected by staff, students and parents and ably assisted by the assistant principal to ensure smooth running of the school.
- All activity in the school is driven by the collection, analysis and interpretation of data at student, class, grade, subject and individual level to raise progress and performance.
- The school has dedicated and committed staff who work collaboratively to fulfill the needs of all students.
- High priority is given to attendance, which has raised levels to above the city average.
- Staff and students have extremely high expectations of themselves and each other.
- Classroom activities are differentiated to suit the abilities, learning styles and interests of individual and groups of students.
- There are very high levels of engagement in and enjoyment of learning by all students, who are polite and well behaved in and out of the classroom.
- Levels of achievement are rising, in some cases above those found in similar schools.
- The curriculum has been adapted and enhanced to overcome challenges caused by lack of facilities, while fulfilling the needs and interests of students.
- Lessons are well planned and show differentiation, individualized goal setting and the appreciation of students' diverse learning styles.

What the school needs to improve

- When analysing and interpreting data, break it down into ethnicity, gender and other specific groupings to monitor possible issues.
- Investigate professional development on neuro-diversity, such as dyspraxia, which may affect the learning facility of some students.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The School of International Cultures is a comparatively new school, but in the five years of its operation it has designed systems for collecting, analysing and interpreting data which inform every activity in the school, including goal setting and intervention services.

The staff, many of who are quite new to teaching, work collaboratively and consistently to improve the performance of all students. They are dedicated and committed to the school and its students and everywhere the school shows reinforcement of learning. Examples of mathematical procedures and critiques of books, often written by students, line classroom walls, achievements of students are demonstrated in hallways and high expectations are everywhere. Teachers are totally confident that students will succeed and this belief is equally held by the students and their parents.

The school has compensated for its lack of facilities in the building by designing a dance and arts curriculum that can be carried out in one classroom and have arranged an extra-curriculum program to fulfill the needs expressed by students for sporting and artistic pursuits.

Students are confident, polite and extremely well behaved in and out of classrooms. It is a happy school and one whose total belief in the success of its students, along with careful targeted intervention for individual students, classes and grades is enjoying rising levels of achievement.

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

Data is used formally and informally throughout the school and is used systematically to monitor, understand and increase student progress. Fountains/Purnell reading levels, for example, are used from the Columbia University Readers and Writers Workshop Program, with running records of independent and guided reading levels. This informs class reading groups and individual goal setting. The principal monitors these records on a monthly basis to track student progress and to identify those in need of intervention. Running records of student-teacher conferences support this information and profiles are built up of classes, grades and individual students.

Other internal data comes from attendance reports, mathematics benchmark assessments from the mandatory curriculum, monthly academic intervention service assessments and reports, formal and informal classroom observations, weekly meetings of the academic intervention service and pupil personnel team, teacher and parent surveys.

Formalized data includes information from ECLAS, State-wide English language arts, mathematics, social studies and science scores, EPAL, NYSESLAT, LAB-R, Princeton Reviews, Gains reports and DRA assessments.

Data gathering, analysis and interpretation throughout the school is used for each class, grade level, academic subject and individual student, but there are no systems in place at the moment for analysing or interpreting results of categories of students grouped by, for example, ethnicity, special education or English language learners. The principal and assistant principal have discussed the gender imbalance in the state mathematics tests, but this is currently at a very early stage. One theory for this imbalance is the influence of gender difference in teaching style, and data is now being collected to compare the performance of boys in the class taught by a male to that in the same grade being taught by a female.

Now that the school is in its second year of full attendance, it feels able to compare performance with other years and similar schools.

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 Comprehensive Education Plan is representative of the high level of collaboration within the school. Written by the school leadership team, it has input from the principal and assistant principal, the staff, and parents, and contains long, medium and short-term goals in the action plan, which is monitored and reviewed by the principal monthly.

Goal setting across grades and classes is facilitated by monthly faculty conferences and weekly common preparation time across grades. There are also grade facilitators’ meetings monthly in which representatives from each grade discuss progression and support each other with new ideas and experience of what has and has not been successful. Conferences with students are ongoing and are vehicles for short and medium - term goals.

Particular attention is given to the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement by the academic intervention service and pupil personnel team. Those deemed at risk are those at lower levels or any student whose performance may be dropping. The academic intervention service works in six week cycles of assessment and support. There is an after school program on Tuesdays and Wednesdays for extra support in literacy and numeracy, which has been found to improve students’ progress. An incentive for students to attend is the chance to go to after-school activities on Thursdays and Fridays in sport and arts activities, although the latter are open to everyone. Extra support is given to struggling readers by READ volunteers who carry out one-to-one tuition during the day

Students and staff have extremely high expectations of themselves and each other. On the hallway wall is a photograph of a fifth grade class with the caption ‘College Graduation Class of 2018’. In every classroom, data is displayed on reading and writing progress and student achievement. Expectations drive planning and goal setting across the school and this is reinforced by the high expectations that students have for themselves.

Parents and the school are in regular communication about individual students, classes, grades and the whole school. Parents are encouraged to come in to discuss students with staff and parent association meetings are well attended. The school puts on programs for parents in areas such as international movement or English language, and parents are encouraged to come in and talk to the students about their countries of origin. The parents also receive regular calendars and bulletins which explain everything that is going on 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

The school follows the mandated curriculum, but enhances it wherever possible. It follows the readers’ and writers’ workshops in collaboration with Teachers’ College throughout the school and this has resulted in improved student performance, with very high literacy scores in grade 3 last year. A mathematics workshop with appropriate checklists is now being developed with the help of the mathematics coach.

Because the school has no gymnasium, a dance curriculum has been developed, featuring dances from the students’ countries of origin. As well as movement and choreography, students study the countries’ history and geography, music, traditions and art, which are reinforced in other lessons.

Differentiation comes from students’ identified needs and observed learning styles. In classrooms, students are allowed to work sitting down, lying down or standing up, however they learn best. All students work quietly and are engrossed in their studies. Groups are constantly changing, depending on activity and class dynamics. Differentiation is evident throughout lesson planning and class activities, where different ways of achieving the same outcome is demonstrated and all students are able to progress. All budgeting, staff and scheduling decisions arise from students’ and staff needs. The extended day was changed to the morning, as students were found to work better then. Teachers’ planning time is arranged around lunch times to give generous time for professional development or extended meetings. The extended sports and arts programme after school on two evenings a week has been paid for from the school budget to widen the curriculum and raise students’ self esteem. This program is very popular and introduced sport into the school. Students’ attendance is a high priority. Absentees are called at home each morning, and receive a home visit from the school social worker after two days. Attendance graphs are displayed in classrooms and hallways, alongside names and photographs of students with perfect attendance. Each month the class with the highest attendance wins an ‘ice-cream party’ at lunch-time which is much coveted.

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

Selection of staff at the school is made by the principal, assistant principal and members of teaching staff. Priority is given to those who share the school’s goals and high expectations and can be trained to work within the school’s culture.

The principal has a background in staff development, so professional development is taken very seriously at the school. It is mainly carried out by coaches, Teachers' College consultants, the principal and assistant principal and class teachers carry out peer development both formally and informally. Professional development is based first on teachers' needs then on students' needs. The principal and assistant principal identify areas of need during walk-throughs and map out training with the coaches. Professional development is also supplied by the region and external providers and formal development days are as differentiated as possible, so that all needs can be addressed. For example, math professional development is targeted at specific age groups, so students' needs can be best addressed. This has raised teachers' confidence across the school.

The principal carries out three classroom observations each year for untenured teachers, and one per year for tenured. Pre- and post- conferences are included, as is formal feedback. Informal walk-throughs by the principal and assistant principal happen continually. Inexperienced teachers receive feedback with three compliments and one tip for the lesson; experienced teachers receive one compliment and three tips so there is instant feedback for all. Each class is visited at least three times per week and teaching staff are confident in sharing good practice and supporting each other

The principal is extremely well respected. Because she has led the school from its inception, every activity in the school has been under her leadership. Staff, parents and students all think highly of her, describing her as "wonderful", "fabulous", "great". Under her leadership and that of the assistant principal, the school runs very smoothly, with good communications and clear procedures.

The school works with the READ programme of volunteers for one-to-one reading tuition and there is a connection with Shiloh Camp, whose counselors come in to help with the school and library. The Retired Service volunteer program works with small groups in the school who benefit from extra support in their subjects. TASC provides extra curricular programs in the evening. The school also works with the Belvis Medical Center which provides health-related workshops and services to families and free flu shots to the staff. Other outside organisations working with the school include the Alvin Ailey dance workshop, the Botanical Gardens and Ballet Hispanico, to enhance the curriculum and Asphalt Green which teaches students how to do sports so that they can teach others.

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

All school plans begin with the Comprehensive Education Plan and include frequent goals and action plans which are regularly monitored and evaluated. Students in the academic intervention service program work in six-weekly cycles and leave when they are no longer at risk.

Plans are regularly altered if circumstances change, for example, the school thought it needed an after-school science program, but after perusing new data, realised social studies would be preferable, and were able to change after two days. The practice of data recording, analysis and interpretation is totally integrated into all school activities, from teaching and learning, through to attendance. Students collect and record their own data, and graphs, charts and statistical representations can be seen in all classrooms. Topics

studied for the data include reading progress, virtue of the month, sunrise and sunset times and 'who got it?' which shows who did particularly well at different activities.

Teachers are quick to change practice and the content of their lessons if appropriate, and class folders show evidence of differentiation and evaluation. This has ensured that students can work in their optimum way and make rapid progress. Academic intervention service and pupil referral teams advise on differentiation for any student needing it, and the coaches are able to identify alternative ways of working during grade discussions.

The cabinet and faculty work with a high level of dedication and commitment to the school and its students, and are flexible enough to change content and process to suit the students, as required.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The School of International Cultures (PS 179)	∅	✓	+
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