



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Pablo Casals School

Middle School 181

**800 Baychester Avenue
Bronx
NY 10475**

Principal: Christopher Warnock

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Reviewer: Jean Mackie

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Pablo Casals School is a middle school located in the northeast area of the Bronx and is part of the Northeast Bronx Education Park. There are 732 students enrolled in grades 5 to 8. The students come from culturally diverse backgrounds. The largest ethnic group (66 %) is Black and 26.5 % of students are Hispanic. The remaining students are largely either of White or Asian heritage. There is a higher proportion (14%) of special education students than in other schools across the City and a much lower proportion (2%) of English language learners. The school also has a much lower proportion of recent immigrants than other schools. These students mainly come from Jamaica, with some arriving from China and the British Virgin Islands.

Attendance is 93.5% which is above that in similar schools, and well above schools across the City. Student stability is below similar schools, but above that for schools across the City as a whole. The school does not receive Title 1 funding because fewer than 50% of students are eligible.

There has been a recent reorganization into four smaller learning communities, each having students from grades 6 to 8. The grade 5 students remain in one separate community to aid transition from the elementary school. Both the principal and assistant principals have been recently appointed to their posts. There is a mix of newly appointed and more experienced teachers on the staff.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The newly appointed and well respected principal has settled well into his role and has a clear vision for the school.
- The recently established senior team has high aspirations for the students in the school and is working well together to plan for improvement.
- Data is being used effectively to track the progress of individuals and cohorts of students as they move through the school.
- The arrangements for grouping the grade 5 classes together help to ensure an effective transition from the elementary school.
- There is some effective differentiated instruction in classrooms as a result of a careful analysis of the needs of the students.
- Professional development is successful in inducting new staff into the school and improving instructional techniques.
- Students are for the most part eager to learn and respond well to their teachers.
- Parental involvement in the school's work is positive and has contributed to improved attendance.
- There is mutual respect shown between students and adults.
- The introduction of common planning time has been welcomed by staff and enabled more opportunities for sharing best practices.

What the school needs to improve

- Adopt a more systematic approach to comparing the outcomes of the school with those of similar schools.
- Refine the targets set in the Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) so that there is a small number of clearly stated priorities that are shared and understood by all.
- Use the monitoring of classroom practice to target professional development support more closely.
- Ensure that the new systems for assessing and tracking progress are being used consistently by all staff.
- Carefully monitor the impact of the recently established learning communities on standards and progress.
- Ensure that all teachers understand their role in monitoring progress within the new structure.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The newly appointed principal has already adopted improvement strategies in line with his vision to raise achievement for all students. He is being well supported in his drive for improvement by his two assistant principals, who are also recent appointments. This senior team has undertaken an in-depth analysis of data such that there is a clearer picture of the progress of cohorts of students as they move through the school. This broader understanding of how students are progressing is being used effectively to inform the goals established for the future.

The school is increasingly driven by the use of data and the evaluation of the impact of its actions on student progress. The school's own monitoring and evaluation shows that academic support for students is improving. Nevertheless, many systems and structures have been in place for too short a time period for this to have had significant impact on student performance. The principal has quickly gained the respect of the school community and clearly has the capacity to move the school to the next level of effectiveness. His enthusiastic staff are fully committed to work with him in his endeavors to secure improvement.

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The new principal is fully aware of the need to collect and analyze data to monitor student progress. Since his appointment, he has undertaken a rigorous approach to this aspect of the school's work and now has a more detailed understanding of student performance, which is being shared with staff. The recently appointed assistant principals have been very active in this process. This has helped the team to develop a good overview of performance in a relatively short period of time. For example, the school has identified that performance in mathematics is weaker when compared with English language arts. The leadership team is also scrutinizing in more detail the progress of gifted, general education and special education students. There has been insufficient time, however, for this work to impact student progress significantly.

The principal and his team are, rightly, particularly interested in comparing the progress of cohorts of students as they move through the school. Variations in outcomes over the years have been identified, as has the high proportion of students at level 2. The progress of special education students and English language learners is tracked carefully by the teachers and is now being monitored more closely at whole school level. Teachers keep running records of student progress and have access to the GROW reports to identify not only the performance levels that each student has achieved but also the progress that they have made over time.

Given the important focus on tracking and promoting growth within the school, less attention has been given to comparing the performance of the school with those in similar contexts. This means that the school is not making as much use of the data as it could to benchmark the standards that the students are achieving against similar institutions and to find out why similar schools may be performing better in certain content areas.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The more sophisticated level of data now available is being used increasingly effectively to set challenging goals for the future. The principal and staff have high expectations of all students and this underpins the drive to raise performance on the State tests even further. An analysis of last year’s grades, for example, has led to an upward revision of the targets currently set in the Comprehensive Education Plan for grade 8 in both English language arts and mathematics. Subject leaders and other key staff join with the principal and the assistant principals to discuss the targets so that a broader awareness of the ambitions and expectations of the school is beginning to shape decisions. This is particularly important given the recent restructuring of the school into the four learning communities and the school is aware that it needs to monitor achievement across the communities.

The information gleaned about student performance is used to group students into the three education populations so that instruction can be targeted more closely to needs. This year performance data has also been used to create more heterogeneous classes in the general education population. This is to promote equally positive learning cultures within each group and early evaluations indicate that this is having the desired impact. Teachers are becoming increasingly confident in using the additional data provided to set goals at individual student level, including for special education students and English language learners. The use of the data to target those students at level 2 who could potentially reach level 3 is at an early stage of implementation.

Parents and students are well aware of the high expectations set by the school. Most students are eager to rise to the challenge and to do their very best. Parents are actively engaged in supporting their children, through helping with homework, for example, and fully endorse the school’s determination to see all students succeed.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The curriculum is aligned with State standards and has a strong focus on developing the basic skills of literacy and mathematics. Adjustments have recently been made to the sequencing of the different topics within mathematics so that it is more closely aligned to the assessment program. There is recognition that computers are not used regularly to support the students in their learning but most of the machines available are outdated. Arrangements for the grade 5 students provide a secure transition from their elementary schools.

The new administration has become increasingly successful in holding teachers accountable for the progress of their students. In a number of classes, teachers are successfully grouping students according to needs and providing appropriately differentiated work for them. Programs for very needy students and the gifted groups are often well designed to provide the right level of challenge. The students respond positively to the teachers in these instances. In some classes, a number of students are compliant rather than fully and actively engaged in learning. Relationships between students and adults are characterized by mutual respect. Students confirm that there is an adult on the staff to whom they could turn should the need arise.

As a result of the recent restructuring, the principal has had to realign both staffing and resources to match the specific needs of the four new learning communities. Movement around the school has been reduced, which is leading to a calmer environment throughout the building and more efficient use of time. The schedule has been adjusted to give teachers common preparation time, which has not been a feature in the school previously and is much appreciated by staff. This is helping to bring greater congruence to their planning and assessment, which is in turn bringing improved consistency to the experiences of students.

There is a continued drive to improve attendance, which is already above that of similar schools and getting better. The students respond well to the rewards system for good attendance. Tardiness has been addressed by adjusting the timing of the school day and this is already leading to improved punctuality.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

There has been a significant change over of staff over the last few years, with quite a number of new teachers joining the school this year. There has been a focus on appointing staff with particular expertise in mathematics in order to strengthen the subject throughout the school. As a result of these changes, the level of expertise in using and analyzing data to improve results is quite variable. The principal and his immediate team are committed to developing greater consistency in practice as a key priority, especially as the amount of data being made available to staff has increased this year. Assessment folders have been developed with clear guidance about how they should be used to help teachers to track and evaluate the progress of their students. It is, however, too early to measure the impact of this.

Professional development sessions have been effective in developing instructional practice that better meets the needs of the students. This includes the use of listening libraries, for example, for small groups of students in a class as part of a differentiated program. Effective mutual support is encouraged by grouping newer members of staff with more experienced teachers. The program of lesson observations is helping to ensure that the administration identifies key priorities for professional development, but it is not always sharply focused on individual need. As a direct result, the quality of instruction remains too variable to ensure that all students consistently make good progress. The common planning periods have provided much needed time for teachers to share best practices and to adopt a more systematic approach to developing curriculum calendars. Once

again, however, the impact of this initiative on progress and standards is too early to evaluate.

The principal has gained the trust and respect of the whole school community as a result of the changes and improvements that are increasingly evident to all. The principal has a very good capacity to achieve his vision for the school. He is working well to disperse leadership throughout the staff and students by empowering them to take responsibility for their own actions. Links with outside institutions and support services are growing. The school is well managed and runs effectively on a day-to-day basis.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal was already on the staff when he was appointed to his new post. He was therefore well placed to take an immediate overview of the school and to note key strengths and areas for development. The analysis of performance data and observations around the school led to a decision to restructure into four learning communities. This has been undertaken as a collaborative exercise with teachers and parents. Other initiatives, such as common planning time for teachers in the same grade and changes to the school day have also been introduced following this initial evaluation. These are positive steps and moving the school in the right direction. The principal's analysis shows that these changes are having an impact on the quality of what is happening within the school, with changes to the daily schedule leading to improved punctuality, for example. As yet, it is too early to measure the impact on student outcomes.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is extensive, with a large number of actions to be undertaken, but focused overarching priorities are less clear. The principal and his team recognize the need to have a more concise document that more clearly identifies responsibilities, particularly at subject level, for monitoring the changes the school wishes to implement and time scales for checking progress.

At the individual student level, there is much discussion about the targets set and the progress towards them. Teachers are in regular discussion with subject leaders and other colleagues to agree on next steps and to adjust instructional programs accordingly. Some useful guidance to support this work is being developed by the literacy coach and similar developments are evolving in mathematics. There is a clear determination by all that the work of the school should be fully focused on improving outcomes for students.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Pablo Casals School (MS 181)	∅	✓	+
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	