



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

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



# **Quality Review Report**

**School of Performing Arts**

**Intermediate School 217**

**977 Fox Street  
Bronx  
NY 10459**

**Principal: Louis Corominas**

**Dates of review: November 8 - 9, 2006**

**Reviewer: Jean Mackie**

## 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 school is located in the Hunts Point area of south Bronx and serves a culturally diverse community. The largest ethnic group (70%) is Hispanic with Black students forming the second largest group. The remaining students are largely of White heritage. There are 445 students enrolled in grades five through eight. Approximately 22% of students are English language learners and an additional 18% have been identified as having special needs. The school is divided into four smaller learning communities, each with classes of students from the four different grades. The school is strongly committed to working closely with parents, many of whom do not speak English as their first language at home. Connections with the local community are extensive and the school building is used fully, seven days a week. The school is eligible for Title 1 funding.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school is led by a very experienced and inspirational principal who is highly respected by the entire school community.
- There is a common sense of purpose and high expectations among the staff who are all fully committed to developing the students into well-rounded and confident individuals.
- Performance data is used well to monitor the progress of the students, to inform instructional programs, and to set challenging goals for the future.
- There is a very strong sense of teamwork throughout the school that enables and encourages the sharing of good practice.
- Teachers regularly challenge students to take responsibility for their own learning by, for example, asking them to explain their ideas to their peers and to make presentations to their peers.
- The performing arts program is an integral part of the curriculum and underpins the basic core to stimulate real engagement and enjoyment among the students.
- Professional development is very well structured and has resulted in improvements in instructional techniques.
- Regular evaluation of the school's work has led to significant improvements in student progress.
- Mutual respect between adults and students underpins a shared enthusiasm for learning and achievement.
- The regular celebrations of achievement have a positive impact on the self esteem of the students, who along with their parents, are very proud of the school.

### What the school needs to improve

- Analyze the relative performance of boys and girls in greater detail to explore possible reasons for the variation and to identify potential strategies for addressing the disparity.
- Continue the drive to improve progress and standards through the actions already being taken to strengthen differentiation and raise the quality of writing across the school.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

The principal is a strong presence around the school and is the driving force behind its success. He has built an experienced and effective team around him which works collaboratively for the benefit of the students. Good support is also provided by parents and other members of the local community. There is a strong sense of mutual respect, with all associated with the school showing great pride in it.

The analysis of data underpins all aspects of the school's work. Improvements in outcomes are celebrated and the progress shown is used to set challenging individual and whole-school targets for the future. There is some high quality instruction that engages the students, enabling them to progress well. Teachers use data effectively to both group students and to inform their instructional programs. As a result, all students including those with special needs and English language learners, are well supported.

The strong performing arts element of the curriculum is highly valued by the students who enjoy, for example, singing in the choir. The well-focused professional development program has been effective in improving instruction.

The principal and his team have made some major changes to the school's structure as a result of careful analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. The establishment of the four learning communities has led to a more positive learning culture and better outcomes. Current priorities are being tackled with rigor.

### **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.**

A wide range of data is collected so that the school is able to monitor not only the outcomes of standardized tests, but also keep a regular check on the progress of individual students across the curriculum. The principal uses top-level data to track trends over time and to compare the performance of his school with those in similar contexts. His recent analysis shows favorable comparisons with such schools. In particular, he has identified a decline in the proportion of students at Level 1 and an increase in those achieving Levels 3 and 4 in both English and mathematics. Information like this is shared with all teachers so that everyone has a clear understanding of how the students are achieving across the school.

Performance data, along with additional monitoring information, has been used to compare performance at different grades. This analysis has already been used to target additional support and resources for the single grade where outcomes have been identified as being

the weakest. Subject analysis has led the school to identify correctly the need to focus on developing writing across the curriculum.

Data on each student's progress, with information about attendance, is recorded regularly by the teacher on a class assessment sheet. These sheets are common across the school so that there is consistency in practice and patterns of progress can be easily tracked. Links between attendance and performance are easily identifiable and acted upon where appropriate.

Students with special needs and those who are English language learners are carefully identified from the data so that suitable support programs can be planned. To date, the school has not yet analyzed the relative performance of boys and girls and the reasons for the differences between them. It has recognized the value in doing this and has already begun to consider possible steps to be taken.

**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 clear desire among the staff to do the very best for their students underpins the effective use of data to celebrate success and to set challenging goals for the future at the school, grade and student levels. The strong team-oriented culture within the school makes this is very much a collaborative exercise. The different teams within the school work well together so that goals are shared and plans to achieve them are fully understood by all. Teachers and support staff work collectively to analyze the performance data of students with special education needs and those who are English language learners to set realistic but challenging targets for them, with the next learning steps clearly identified. The benefits of this focused and individualized approach has been recognized as an effective way to track and secure progress, and has therefore been extended to all students who now all have personal intervention plans. These are monitored by class teachers, department chairs and the team leaders of the learning communities to ensure that goals are set and that progress is made toward meeting them. This process ensures that concerns are identified quickly and that plans are adjusted accordingly. Expectations for all are high.

Parents and caregivers are regularly informed about the curriculum and the progress that their child is making. They appreciate the high aspirations that the school has for their children and fully support them. The students themselves are well aware of what is expected of them and show a real determination to succeed. The many strong relationships with the local community mean that there is an external perspective on the work of the school. This community perspective is actively incorporated into the establishment of the school's goals and aspirations for the future.

**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 is very careful to ensure that the curriculum provided fully matches the needs of its students. There is consistency across the four learning communities with regard to the basic core, but the individual identities of the communities are reflected through variations in emphasis and theme. A comprehensive program of support is in place to help special education students and English language learners to meet their targets, including small group instruction. There is a real drive, however, to enable these most needy students to access mainstream classes more regularly so that they can also benefit from the activities and challenges that exist in the larger groups.

The performing arts program is a particular strength of the curriculum, with each student selecting one of five strands to study in depth. As a result, talents have been nurtured and the school has produced a number of highly-accomplished musicians, singers and artists.

Teachers are fully aware of their accountability to maximize student outcomes and they use performance information effectively to refine their instructional programs. The high expectations of teachers are evident when they regularly ask students to give their opinions about issues or to explain how they have tackled a mathematical problem, for example. The students respond positively to these challenges, presenting their ideas or research with pride and confidence. Students’ high level of interest in their work is clearly evident. Good use is made of partnered talk so that the teacher is able to assess levels of understanding while moving around the classroom. This information is being used to support increased differentiation in classrooms, which has also been identified as a priority for the school for this year.

The principal regularly uses the data to inform his staffing and resource requirements. As a result, there is a good match of both personnel and resources to effectively implement the curriculum. A recent focus on improving attendance through rewards and acknowledgements has already led to better figures for this year relative to the same period last year.

**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.**

In his continued drive for improvement, the principal has selected his staff carefully. He has established an experienced and committed team of professionals who all share his vision and aspirations for the school. Poor instructional quality is not tolerated. Professional development is well established within the school and is capably led by two key members of staff. Tests and ongoing assessments are used effectively to establish areas for whole school development, such as the need to develop more focused strategies to improving writing skills. In addition, frequent lesson observations by both the principal and other senior staff inform areas for development for individual teachers. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice and regularly visit other classrooms to broaden

their experience. Development programs are largely in-house and often take place in classrooms so that the impact of initiatives can be measured directly. The systematic approach to team planning meetings of different groups of staff facilitates the sharing of good practice and ideas for improvements. The openness with which these discussions are held promotes highly professional feedback on what is working well and what needs to be done next. The high quality teaching which results has been instrumental in achieving improved outcomes for students. It has also been recognized externally and the school is a base for the New York City Training Fellows program. The school's impact on its students' achievement and progress is reinforced by strong connections with local groups and the engagement of external individuals in the support and intervention.

The principal is recognized by all as an inspirational leader who has real capacity to effect change. He, along with his senior staff, ensures that the school is well managed 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 well developed.**

The Comprehensive Education Plan is a living document for the school. The principal's belief that there is no point in analyzing data unless action is taken as a result underpins the way that the school implements its improvement program. One of the most significant steps to be taken as a result of evaluating not just performance data but also attitudes to learning was to group students into four learning communities, each with classes from the four grades. The administrative structure that manages the communities, and close collaboration between the teams, has led to an improved culture within the school reflected by students who are eager to attend and learn. Rates of progress have risen as a result.

Detailed scrutiny of both quantitative and qualitative data has also led to focused areas of improvement, such as the drive to improve differentiation and writing skills among the students.

At the individual student level, teachers plan both individually and with colleagues to ensure that the needs of all students are met. Plans are flexible and are revised in light of regular review and evaluation. The school is a place where nobody is complacent; there is a continual desire to learn from one another for the benefit and development of the students within the school.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: School of Performing Arts (IS 217)</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