



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Poe Cottage Elementary School

Public School 246

2641 Grand Concourse

Bronx

NY 10468

Principal: Beverly Pascal-Miller

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Reviewer: Jeffery Plumb

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Poe Cottage School is an elementary school which serves 808 students from kindergarten through grade 6. There are 80% Hispanic students, 11% Black, 8% Asian and 1% other. Thirty-five percent of students are English language learners and 10% are special education students. Attendance at 93% is above the average for similar and in line with that found in all City schools. The school receives Title 1 funding for 91.4% of its students, a figure lower than similar schools but significantly higher than most City schools. The school has an outstanding outdoor track facility for physical education and a modern, very well resourced library.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and staff at all levels are dedicated and hardworking and passionately want to raise student achievement.
- The school services the needs of special education students well.
- The criteria for identifying the needs of English language learners are clear.
- The arts curriculum is good and promotes enjoyment in learning.
- The library is an outstanding learning resource, being used well and leading to an improvement in standards.
- The system for tracking student progress in reading from kindergarten through grade 3 is good.
- The outdoor track for physical education is an excellent resource contributing greatly to enjoyment and performance.
- Students have a positive attitude to learning and behave exceptionally well.
- The school tries very hard to encourage care givers to be involved in the learning of their children.

What the school needs to improve

- Raise achievement in English language arts and mathematics, particularly in grade 4.
- Compare data about tests from one year to the next and against similar schools and gather and use data about the performance of different ethnic groups and boys and girls and use it to raise achievement.
- Provide professional development to help school staff including administrators use data to create a clear overview to assist making and evaluating the success of planning and programs.
- Ensure that whole school planning is sufficiently flexible to accommodate immediate revision to goals to raise achievement based on data.
- Ensure that all members of the administration are clear about the direction the school is moving in and the part that they have to play in achieving its plan.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school.

Analysis and use of data to inform planning to raise achievement does not lie at the heart of this school. School leaders have been particularly remiss at planning flexibility to change goals as new evidence about student performance is made available from test results after the long-term goals have been set on the Comprehensive Education Plan. Administrators are not clear about the vision and sense of direction they should be moving towards. In particular the school has been too inward looking rather than focusing on what similar schools have been able to achieve and the reasons for their achievements.

Systems put in place are not clearly understood by teachers. Teachers, mostly, are hard working and dedicated but are not sufficiently trained in how to use data to differentiate their instruction to raise student achievement. The principal and staff at all levels want students to achieve well, but they are not clear about how to plan to achieve their aim. There are some good features in the school. The school is adept at ensuring that the needs of English language learners are not confused with special education needs. The system for tracking students' progress in reading from kindergarten through grade 3 is a good one, but not all teachers are confident in using it. Students with special education needs are serviced well. However, all too often the gut feeling the principal has about big issues, such as the possible adverse effect of a large transient student population on test results is not backed up by analysis of hard data. There are some excellent resources, notably the outdoor track area for physical education and the state of the art library. However, the classroom spaces used for kindergarten children are too small.

At the time of the review robust evidence of capacity to improve was lacking. Consequently this is an undeveloped school.

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

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

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

The school gathers a range of test and teacher assessment data to build up a picture of what each student knows and can do. The administration have introduced and implemented systems to support teachers in using data to track students' progress over time. However, the use of these systems is inconsistent throughout the school. The kindergarten and grade 1 to 3 teachers meet once a month and use data to revise plans and achievement goals for their classes. This meeting structure, although in place for grades 4 to 6, is not so secure or robust. Teachers in these grades are not so confident in the use of data to monitor student progress.

The school does not use data to gain an understanding of the performance of different ethnic groups. There is no analysis of performance by gender. Satisfactory use is made of data to understand the performance of English language learners and special education

students. This data is available to track their progress, but again there is inconsistency in its use throughout the school. The school experiences a significant transience issue. It believes that the very low reading and writing skills of many students, who join the school, often just weeks before State tests, has an adverse effect on its overall performance. However, it has not gathered or used hard data to investigate this belief or to plan to raise the achievement of these students. Satisfactory data is gathered about how well higher achievers perform, but it is more summative than formative and so these students can be in the school for a long period of time before they are sufficiently challenged.

No comparisons are made about how well or badly the school performs against similar schools. Furthermore it does not focus in sharply enough on how its current performance compares against its past performance. It does not compare how the same students perform in one subject against another. There has not been a robust analysis surrounding the 20% decline in the grade 4 mathematics test results between 2005 and 2006 compared with similar schools. English language arts test results in the same grade also lagged behind those found typically in 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 undeveloped.

There is a collaborative model to involve all teachers in the setting of the school’s long-term goals for improvement. However, the strategic plan once established lacks flexibility. Important data that comes to the fore following the setting of these goals is not used to revise them. The development of stepped interim goals with plans and timeframes to achieve the long-term improvement goals is a weakness. For example, there is a broad stroke goal to raise performance in mathematics tests in the Comprehensive Education Plan, but it has not been refined in the light of students’ performance in the 2006 test results. Common planning time enables class teachers of the same grade to come together regularly but too many of them lack confidence in the use of data to set goals to improve the programs they use. For example, the kindergarten through grade 3 teachers greatly value the Reading First Program they use, but data gathered from the program is used insufficiently to raise students’ achievement in reading.

Planning and setting of goals for students whose performance has been identified as a particular focus area is variable. Overall, it is good for special education students and satisfactory for English language learners. However, insufficient data is analyzed to see how effective the bi-lingual program is in preparing grade 2 students to develop the skills they require to take the English language arts examination when they move to grade 3. These students are not sufficiently baseline tested to enable immediate short step progress goals to be set for them.

Students say, ‘Our teachers have high expectations of us’. However, the students are not clear enough about what they must do to improve their work. This in part reflects the inconsistency in conferencing with students throughout the school, but also the fact that they are not given specific tailor made rubrics or targets to improve their work. Students are insufficiently involved in setting their own academic targets. The school tries very hard to encourage parents to be more involved in the learning of their children, but remains concerned that too few parents engage in this partnership with them. The action plans to narrow the gap in the schools performance against similar schools in English language

arts and mathematics tests are not robust enough. They do not focus sufficiently on the classes and teachers most in need of targeted support to bring about the necessary improvement.

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 undeveloped.

The school has planned its curriculum flexibly to meet mandated requirements. It successfully promotes enjoyment in learning through its arts and physical education programs. The use of the 37 ½ minute program for a guitar class is a strong feature. Good programs have been implemented to raise achievement, but teachers are not sufficiently confident in using data generated from these programs to set goals to accelerate learning for students. Teachers are not robustly enough held to account for improving their instruction and student outcomes. There is too much inconsistency in the use of data to plan and differentiate instruction throughout the school. Those teachers most in need of improvement are not always targeted for the development required.

Spending, staffing and scheduling decisions are based on students needs as identified by data. A conscious decision has been made to move some strong teachers to grade 4 to raise achievement. There has been a significant investment in targeted academic intervention support for special education students and it has benefited these students. A science specialist has been scheduled to prep grades 3 and 4 to raise their performance in the State test.

Overall, instruction is satisfactory and engages students in learning, but it is inconsistent across the school. Practices agreed within a grade to drive up standards are not always evident in classes. Next steps for improvement from conferencing in writing and reading are not always clear. Some instruction, such as that in a grade 5 collaborative team class on Ancient Egypt enthuse the students to learn. However, in other lessons pace is pedestrian and students are not clear about what is expected of them. The academic needs of students are not sufficiently met in all lessons.

Students mostly have positive attitudes to learning and they behave exceptionally well in lessons. They say, ‘We feel safe at school including when in the playground and we have an adult in school we can turn to with any problems we have’. However, they are concerned about the number of fights that take place during the lunch recess and would value seeing this time in the school day better managed. Attendance is high profile. It is above average compared to similar schools. Procedures for following up absence are thorough.

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 undeveloped.

The principal is respected by students, parents and teachers. However, her fellow administrators say, ‘We are not sufficiently clear about the direction in which the school is going’. They consider that there is a plethora of activity, but insufficient focused priorities.

Evidence supports administrators' judgment in this respect. Routines are not always clear. There are some glitches in the day-day running of the school. This is aptly summed up by the students who say, 'Last minute changes are confusing, especially when our teachers have to re-scramble their lesson plans at the last moment'. Review evidence concurs with the students view and the problem is a lack of forward strategic planning.

In interviewing candidates for teacher posts insufficient attention is paid to the capacity they have to use data to improve student performance and progress. Professional development is insufficiently targeted on a data based student needs analysis. It is better in kindergarten through grade 3 than in grades 4 to 6. The principal frequently observes lessons and teachers say that she gives them very constructive feedback. However, evidence from the quality review shows that administrators are not sufficiently skilled at honing in on the connection between teaching and learning when they observe lessons. Inter class and inter school visitations are strong features and support teachers well.

Insufficient attention is given to the evaluation of test results to inform planning to raise achievement. Periodic interim benchmark progress markers linked to specific programs, such as the Read First program, are used to set goals to raise achievement, but this is inconsistent. Links with external partners to enhance student learning are good. There is an effective link with 'Dreamyards'. It makes a valuable contribution to raising students' awareness of the visual arts. In addition the link with the Robin Hood Foundation has secured funding to provide students with a state of the art library. The students enjoy this resource.

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 undeveloped.

All school plans and other interventions do not sufficiently include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of student progress. This is a significant weakness and denies students' the opportunity to make the best improvement to their work and maximize achievements. There are some comparisons of student progress across classrooms, but this is an inconsistent activity and too many teachers do not have the confidence in using data to make these comparisons.

Insufficient attention is paid to modifying final goals based on information and data available in the school during the academic year. The planning model is far too rigid to enable agility and flexibility in realigning practices and resources to achieve long term goals.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Poe Cottage Elementary School (PS 246)	∅	✓	+
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		