



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Elizabeth Barrett Browning School

Middle School 399

**120 East 184th Street
Bronx
NY 10468**

Principal: Yolanda Torres

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Reviewer: Margaret Lee

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Elizabeth Barrett Browning School has 803 students in grades 6 through 8. There are 112 special education students in self-contained and collaborative classes and 255 English language learners. The largest ethnic group of students is Hispanic, approximately 74.6%, with 22.9% Black, 0.5% White and the balance being Asian with approximately 1.4%. Approximately 100% of students are Title 1 eligible. School attendance is 88.9%, below average compared with similar and City-wide schools.

The school has been transformed over the last five years from an unsafe and uncaring place to one which focuses on the delivery of good learning experiences in a safe environment. There are several partnerships with the local community groups working for the benefit of all students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a highly respected leader who takes a personal interest in each child and teacher in her work to transform the school into a successful learning environment for all.
- The high proportion of English language learners are taught well with careful monitoring of progress.
- Student-centered learning is actively practiced in classrooms.
- Teachers demonstrate a committed approach to their work with students.
- The administrative team supports teachers well to meet the needs of students.
- Professional development is based on teacher need with rich discussion existing in professional learning group environments.
- The students are involved in their work through student-centered teaching and good relationships with teachers.
- The parents currently involved feel very much a part of the school community and give their full support and endorsement to the school operations and programs.
- Targeted use of the school's budget ensures teachers' classrooms are well resourced.
- The school environment is diligently monitored to maintain a calm, working environment.

What the school needs to improve

- Share more widely existing good practice in content planning and effective teaching strategies, including differentiation, across study areas.
- Establish interim measurable learning goals for all groups of students, for use both in classrooms and in overall planning and review.
- Clearly record weekly, monthly and annual assessment data, making the processes more easily explained to new teachers and parents.
- Produce an annual agenda to show when data is collected and analyzed, so that it can more easily feed into school development planning and review.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school, with some undeveloped features.

The school is being transformed with consistent leadership, guidance and direction. The principal is an effective leader with good capacity to build relationships and achieve positive change. The teachers assess students regularly, with particularly good practice from English language arts teachers. The school uses qualitative and quantitative information to inform decision-making about school practices, but is not yet using the information in sufficient detail to set measurable goals or differentiate work for students.

The visibility of the principal and senior staff maintains the standards of student behavior outside of classrooms and establishes a disciplined tone throughout the school. Teachers feel supported in classroom management and with disciplinary actions for students to maintain productive learning environments. There is a healthy spirit of professionalism and sharing with a lot of worthwhile discussions about teaching.

School resources and partnerships are prioritized to support the learning and development of the whole child. The introduction of computers and the latest technology e.g., Smart Boards, has been a recent valued asset for students and teachers.

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.

Teachers skillfully undertake and use a range of informal and formal assessment. They use diagnostic tests and teacher-driven assessments such as teacher-student conferencing, and compile student work examples into student portfolios. These are used to good benefit in their teaching. All class levels are also tested with Diagnostic Reading Assessment tool and these results are closely monitored over time to evaluate student improvement. All student records of progress remain with the students and are handed onto each teacher in the new school year so that teachers are aware of students' levels.

The school has created a centralized computer database to record student information alongside performance on assessments and State and City tests. Teachers manage the recording of students' interim progress measures well. The school is aware of its progress according to ethnic groups, especially for students who are English language learners. It reflects on whole-school results each year as a part of goal setting and compares itself annually with other schools and against the requirements of the State and City.

The high proportion of special education students are monitored well on a weekly basis in similar ways to other students. There are weekly meetings between all special education teachers to discuss and plan work and modify teaching points. The students are given the same assessments as the General Education population for academic intervention.

Teaching and learning decisions are based on the needs of students as identified through the detailed analysis of assessments and other data. The data is gathered and analyzed for all grade levels in regular, ongoing cycles. The progress of all teachers in responding to their students' data information is carefully and monitored by the principal through individual teacher meetings, faculty meetings and frequent classroom visits.

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.

Based on data on students achievement in reading, the READ 180 program, a Region wide initiative, was adopted to support struggling students in the 6th grade. Classroom teachers refer to information generated by the program on a daily basis and use it to create learning groups within the classroom to target specific skills. The information from this work is used well as a baseline assessment to judge improvements in students' reading scores. Teachers conference with students daily and there are checklists for looking at student work, especially their writing, to modify teaching accordingly. There are goals for learning at classroom and grade levels; however, they are not expressed in objective measurable ways for short- or long-term improvement.

Student files are well maintained for each student at risk and this information becomes part of discussions in teacher meetings. Teachers are beginning to be more focused on student outcomes through increased use of learning goals which are shared with students to see for themselves improvement in their performance. The school acknowledges that additional support on data evaluation is necessary. However, the school has made good progress in the preparation of student progress reports which have been sent home following all initial student assessments for this year. This assessment process is planned to occur progressively throughout the year. The school uses Spanish and English translators to effectively communicate with parents about student progress and expectations. Good teaching and support is provided to the English language learners in smaller classroom groups. In-classroom support from paraprofessionals is tailored to meet students' needs. Continuous daily assessments occur in these classrooms to very good effect.

Based on lower results than expected and increasing fractious relationships between grade 6 students, the whole school community collaboratively agreed to reorganize student groups for the new school year. This decision was based on qualitative data on student behavior and has made for more congenial groupings of students to enable better learning environments.

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 selection of the range of studies and topics in the school curriculum is based on the needs of students in the core learning areas. Students in grade 8 are given the opportunity to study for a Regents exam in science one year ahead of high school

students. The curriculum is enriched with after-school activities and studies such as technology, health and gymnasium, giving good learning opportunities to students.

Curriculum calendars based upon regional curriculum plans have been prepared by faculty. They are used well to assist consistent teaching by grade level. Teachers of English language arts and social studies have planned curriculum topics based on student needs. This is not yet consistent practice across the school, so that the benefit of cross-referencing learning with other subject areas is not occurring regularly. There is good practice in the development of the English language arts curriculum.

Teachers, especially in the English language arts and English language learner classes, are competent in teaching and assessment. A range of differentiated instruction occurs in different studies and at different levels. Teacher accountability is increasing as teachers thoroughly review students' performance in all study areas. However, not all teachers yet fully understand the need to be accountable for their students' progress, nor the role of differentiated instruction based on assessment in raising achievement.

The school budget has been allocated to the learning needs of students. Classrooms are resourced well with teaching materials suitable for the reading levels of students. The school is working towards the students becoming familiar with technology as a teaching tool and access to classroom computers is increasing.

The students are made to feel valued, feel safe within the school and appreciate the school discipline. Students developed their own classroom management procedures with their homeroom teachers who meet the students twice per day as a way of guiding their progress and development, and ensuring that regular homework is completed. The school organizational structure has been changed to enable this relationship, building contact time with one teacher consistently and regularly.

The school is addressing reductions in student lateness and identifying ways to maintain attendance levels, although these remain below average. The school has good monitoring procedures for recording student absences and routinely conducts home visits after two days of student absence.

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, with some well developed areas.

The leadership team and staff are highly committed to ensuring that good teachers are available for the school. It is a young teaching staff and much emphasis has been placed in professional development about school standards and expectations of teaching and learning practices. This has been successful in establishing stimulating classrooms. Other teachers have been a stable presence in the school for long periods of time and they share their experience with and support younger teachers. There is a 'buddy' system in place for new teachers. The principal and assistant principals regularly visit classrooms and take a dedicated professional interest in the quality of teaching and learning. Follow-up discussions are held with teachers with strategies to support any teachers who are under-performing.

Regular planned professional development occurs. The professional development plan is designed to have a significant impact upon on classrooms. Professional development

activities model good classroom practice. Teachers in some faculties work exceptionally well in professional learning teams with valuable input from the experienced staff. This sharing of professional practice is very open and productive, and teachers feel that they can seek assistance and support. However, these meetings are not used well enough to compare student results or for self- and peer-evaluation. Common teacher preparation time is used productively by teachers to develop lesson planning. There is some excellent teaching resulting in students' involvement in their work.

Professional development from outside the school is also undertaken. For example, one teacher visited the Quality Teaching English language learning San Francisco Think Tank recently, and briefed staff on her return. As a result, the program is now being followed in the bi-lingual and other classes.

The school demonstrates high levels of cooperation, care and concern for all students. The school community is supportive of the school. Systems and processes, especially in the creation of a safe and secure learning environment, have been altered to meet the needs of students. The principal is well respected, and provides clear leadership. She and the senior staff maintain students' behavior to good effect and are constantly alerting students where misdemeanors occur. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis.

The school is a community centre with school and community partnerships operating very successfully. These partnerships include; Youth for R.E.A.L., Dance Organization, Music groups, Educational Network Artistic and Creative Theatre (ENACT) and Attendance Improvement and Drop-Out Prevention (AIDP) program.

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, with undeveloped areas.

Practices and processes within the school are being critically reviewed and altered for improvement over the long and short term. This is a school that is very conscious of the importance of progress review. The staff leadership team and faculty members all review progress towards goals. Teachers monitor their students' progress well while the school leadership team monitors progress against results for the same time period of the previous year. The school regularly and routinely assesses students' development and progress by goals for each grade level.

The principal and teachers all collect data as evidence of performance. Interim diagnostic and teacher classroom-based assessments are discussed at faculty and grade level meetings and are used to form school goals. However, these goals do not contain measurable targets. At present, there is not a sufficiently strong use of data for focused goal-setting in development and review of school action plans. While goals are well established for student intervention plans, school planning does not clearly show how goals will be measured or evaluated against the impact on students' progress. A well-planned and documented monitoring cycle to critically examine the data and develop interim actions to redress the shortcomings is not in place.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Elizabeth Barrett Browning School (MS 399)	∅	✓	+
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	