



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Park Slope Education Complex

Middle School 088

**544 7th Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11215**

Principal: Ailene Mitchell

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Lead Reviewer: Paul Smith

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Park Slope Education Complex is a middle school with 887 students from grade 6 through grade 9. The school population comprises 61% Hispanic, 14% Black, 15% Asian and 10% White students. The student body includes 7.6% English language learners and 9.4% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 92.3%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 100% eligibility.

The school is divided into three houses, specializing in technology and science focused on health or the arts respectively.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's shared vision has created an environment in which teachers and students take responsibility for their own progress.
- The faculty uses extensive data to identify areas of strength and where improvement is needed.
- Teachers track student progress well, quickly changing curriculum plans to meet students' needs.
- The curriculum is very successfully integrated through inquiry-based learning to fully engage students and enable them to apply their understanding well.
- Teachers are empowered to develop their own courses, making them responsible for students' learning.
- Teachers build differentiated activities into all lessons to enhance the learning of all students.
- Teachers work together very effectively to develop and deliver rigorous units of study that maintain high standards.
- Innovative, but thorough, professional development strategies successfully address the needs of teachers whatever their level of experience.
- Students are well prepared to set their own targets and evaluate their own performance, thus taking responsibility for achieving their goals.
- Students are taught by a small team of staff who know them well, so their personal development needs are met effectively.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure the impact on students' learning resulting from a change in procedures is carefully evaluated before being replicated.
- Evaluate more precisely the performance of different groups of students to understand better the reasons for their relative success.
- Build capacity within the faculty to ensure the inquiry-based model is embedded regardless of personnel.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The remit of the Park Slope Education Complex is to focus students' attention on being able to understand concepts by considering a series of questions or problems. By finding their own solutions, the students understand the central issues more deeply and are able to apply them more widely. Thus, lessons are different at Park Slope. This is even more the case in the biannual "Integrated Projects Week", planned jointly with The Centre for Environmental Research and Conservation at Columbia University, when the schedule is abandoned and all students choose the project they wish to follow from a large range of options. All projects are firmly based on core curricular concepts and students' learning is evaluated against these criteria. The courses engage students by building on their interests and involving them in practical activities, "How Loud is Too Loud?" investigates noise levels around the City and "Acrobatic Poetry", interprets poetry through dance, for example.

Such innovative curriculum development depends on the dedicated staff, who are willing to take the initiative and responsibility for delivering units of work of their own design, to meet the criteria of State standards. This is achieved through the vision of the principal who appoints teachers who are willing to be flexible in their teaching strategies, inculcates them in the philosophy of the school and gives them the responsibility to carry through their ideas, while carefully monitoring the progress students make as a result. The large number of teachers that training colleges or other schools have invited to take posts can validate the success of the model. This has made it difficult for Park Slope to build the capacity it would like to investigate inquiry learning further. The inquiry team has made progress in analyzing the effects on one group of students, but lessons learned have yet to be replicated throughout the school.

However, the curriculum is only a means to engage and teach students. As all students are to learn by inquiry, teachers plan courses to meet each student's needs. Hence, built into the design of every course are differentiated activities, something the school has tackled since the last Quality Review. The school's organization means that teachers plan lessons to meet the preferences of each group of students. Equally important, each student is well known by the small group of teachers in their house. Just as teachers take responsibility for their courses, students take responsibility for their progress. The excellent relationship between students and staff is crucial to this being successful. They trust each other and as a result, students thrive.

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 the student's progress overtime.

This area of the school's work is well developed

Due to extensive professional development and teachers working together, all teachers in the school are confident handling data on student progress. They have a data binder for each student, to which they refer and update frequently. It contains information of each student's targets and progress in a number of aspects of the subject, such as revising and adding details in writing. However, all students also track their own progress, and for them to judge their success, each aspect has to be broken down still further, use a mentored text to revise the beginning and ending, for example. Consequently, teachers know exactly what each student knows and are able to design the next steps in their learning specifically for them.

What is true of all students is even more the case with special education students and English language learners. Their teachers keep a detailed framework of their progress, being able to pinpoint their needs specifically. Consequently, well-targeted programs are in place to address issues such as decoding or fluency. The result is that students succeed and move out of these classes in significant numbers.

As there are only a small number of teachers in each of the houses, they are able to meet regularly and compare progress of different classes, so ensuring comparability. The administration in the school frequently interrogates aggregated data derived from standardized assessments across the whole school. Thus, they are able to identify trends and exceptions that they feed back to teachers who adapt their courses to meet any deficiencies in their students' learning. This analysis of data by administration identified the underperformance in reading comprehension of Hispanic English language learners, as a focus for the inquiry team. However, this analysis of different groups is less sophisticated than that for individual students.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is outstanding.

Students are used to monitoring their own progress, so they are confident to set their own goals both quantitative ones in the long term and ones set to specific standards in the short term. They are eager to progress and consequently set high standards for themselves. Students evaluate their own success in detail, occasionally writing their appraisal in a letter to their parents. This self-evaluation emphasizes the reasons for their progress and makes them more determined to do even better in the future. The faculty confirms these high standards by setting a target for each student of 1.25 years' growth in reading and 80% mastery in uniform assessments in writing, math, science and social studies. If general areas of misunderstanding exist, future units of work are adapted to include these elements, reemphasis on minerals integrated into a unit on

“The Body” in science, for example. As a result, students make extremely good progress. However, those students in greatest need of improvement, while progressing significantly above City norms are yet to make outstanding gains. The inquiry team identified continuity of teachers and increasing support at an early stage as the most effective approach with these students and, as a result, two-thirds of the group now makes greater progress than the school average.

Communications with parents are fundamental to the success of the school. The key to this is insistence on a signed reply slip with all communication, to which parents can add comments. Many do, and their comments are part of the planning process for the next unit of study. This procedure builds a relationship between parents and teacher and eases the process for parents to instigate conversations on these or other matters.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school’s work is outstanding.

Students enjoy being at school, as their lessons focus on inquiry and activity to suit their needs and learning preferences. Teachers plan extraordinarily well and are innovative in their design of units of work to meet strictly defined criteria. They frequently work together linking different areas of the curriculum to engage their students, such as a project on Egypt linked history with math by constructing pyramids. Therefore, lessons are both rigorous and interesting. Students are eager to take part in the great variety of activities that make up their school day.

Within a lesson, teachers target different levels of performance and styles of learning. For example, one science lesson on the water cycle involved groups of students devising a storyboard, making a model, discussing and noting pros and cons of rainfall and investigating rainfall levels in different locations. The students had to complete all of this to a strict timetable, which meant finishing the task after the lesson; such was their enthusiasm to succeed. Even extra-curricular courses have to deliver core curricular goals, Salsa dancing and geometric shapes, for example. Thus, teachers take responsibility for students’ progress, as they have designed the vehicle by which student learning takes place.

A close relationship with almost all parents means attendance is good and improving. The school supports this with clear procedures and consequences for the students who are absent, together with celebration for those with a good record.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is outstanding.

In order to build a successful school based on such innovative principles, professional development of high quality is essential. A carefully planned induction program extends for four years. As a result, teachers are integrated into the vision of the school and

subsequently move into leadership roles either within the school or increasingly with training organizations such as Teachers College. Consequently, there is a commonality of practice and understanding in the school. Teachers learn from, and support each other through joint planning and instruction that the school builds into its structure. This is possible as there is a wealth of experience within the school and it works together with many outside consultants, such as AUSSIE and Teachers College, so teachers feel both supported and challenged.

Students feel their teachers are always available whether they wish to see them on academic matters or wider issues; consequently frequent individual and small group conversations take place in non-teaching time. In such an environment, discipline is good and resort to formal measures is rare. "Detention is a big deal." as one student said. Both parents and students speak warmly of the support given in high school applications. The wealth of knowledge and experience available are applied to individual requirements, providing the students with the confidence necessary to successfully move on to their next stage of education.

The principal forms partnerships with outside agencies only if they subscribe to the school's philosophy and academic requirements. Each house has connections with organizations to support their curriculum, Arts Connection and The Methodist Hospital, for example, while the whole school fosters relationships with university education departments to deepen its understanding of how students learn. However, the greatest impact has been with Columbia University, which has developed the school into a research institution where university students can come to learn and the staff at the school has support for their own investigations, starting advisory groups, for example.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

From the principal's vision to create a community of learners evolves the culture of the school. Initiatives from within the school and partnerships with many well chosen, educational organizations move the vision into reality through practical activities in the classroom. The school has developed a highly effective action plan that ensures the administration keeps track of all these initiatives, while satisfying the goals of the school. The plan is flexible and, while there is a specified person responsible for the implementation of each section within a given period, there are not always objective criteria set by which to measure success. This is difficult within a dynamic structure, but there is not always sufficient careful evaluation of each initiative to identify exactly from where benefits derive and so allow replication in other areas of the school.

Plans for improving student outcomes are more distinct. Specific and measurable goals focus the students' minds on what they have to achieve. Teachers carefully monitor these throughout the year and often record progress towards them visually. When students request support, or when teachers deem it necessary, it is available. As a result, students are fully aware of their progress and are keen to concentrate on areas where they have been less successful. What is true of students is also true of teachers, who know exactly where they are on the road to achieving their goals through frequent feedback and specific professional development when necessary.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Park Slope Education Complex	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score				X	

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

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?					X
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?					X
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?					X
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?				X	
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?				X	
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?					X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X	

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?					X
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?					X
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?					X
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?					X
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?					X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2					X

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?					X
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?					X
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?					X
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?					X
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?					X
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?					X
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3					X

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?					X
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?					X
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?					X
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?					X
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?					X
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?					X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?				X	
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?				X	
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?					X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					X

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped