



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**John Ericsson School**

**Middle School 126**

**424 Leonard Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11222**

**Principal: Dr Sheldon Toback**

**Dates of review: January 22 - 23, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Georgie Beasley**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

John Ericsson School is a middle school with 606 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 19% Black, 69% Hispanic, 10% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 90.2%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 70% eligibility.

The school shares the building with a charter high school.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The staff team is committed to providing students with a good education and work together to implement systems, share ideas and improve instruction.
- The coaches work effectively with staff to raise expectations about student achievement and to use data to improve instructional practice.
- The school's new assessment schedule and more focused analysis of data are giving staff more up-to-date information about student achievement.
- Administration is supportive of staff and students, making sure resources are targeted to need.
- New staff feel supported by colleagues and administrators and so quickly follow consistently the school's procedures.
- The school gives good support to special education students and English language learners.
- Homework helps prepare students for lessons and builds effectively on learning in class.
- The parent association is enthusiastic and continually looking for creative ways to engage parents in school life.
- After-school activities enrich student experience, support learning and extend their interests and skills.

### What the school needs to improve

- Work with staff, students and parents to develop a vision which gives the school clear direction and shapes its future development.
- Establish the systems for analyzing data to enable the school to track student progress over time.
- Set objectively measurable goals for the school, each grade and class that enable the school to measure whether students are making the progress they should.
- Implement a strategic plan that details the action and resources required to achieve the school's vision, and the monitoring activities that evaluate whether the school is on track to reach its goals.
- Extend the instructional leadership role of the assistant principals through their more regularly scheduled involvement in monitoring the school's work and the impact of teaching on learning.
- Ensure lesson objectives always focus on learning which can then be used as a tool to differentiate instruction in all classes.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### **Progress made since the last review**

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

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is proficient.**

Since the previous review, there has been a renewed drive to gather and use a wider range of assessment data. As a result, the school focuses in a more concerted way on improving the effectiveness of the curriculum and instruction across the school. Most improved is the identification of needs and subsequent support for special education students and English language learners. Staff work as a collaborative team that is clearly committed to giving students a worthwhile education. The two coaches now give focused support to curriculum and instructional planning and in leading differentiated professional development for identified teachers' needs. The principal makes sure that teachers are given the means to get on with the job and assistant principals and deans support the smooth running of the school day. The parents association is being given a new lease of life through the enthusiasm of its parent officers. The after-school program continues to enrich student experiences. There is still some work to do to compare more rigorously the achievement across subjects and different student groupings and with similar schools. In addition, goals do not have objective measures to guide monitoring activities. The school's strategic vision for its future development lacks clarity of direction. The inquiry team has focused its efforts on raising the achievement of the lower achievers with some success.

### **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 over time.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

Data from monthly tests for English language arts and math, and information from teachers' quizzes and conference notes are building into a detailed profile for each student's achievement during the year. Analyses detail what each student can and cannot do. Well-focused training on how to use the computerized database has helped many teachers to access the information independently without too much ongoing support from the coaches. Alongside previous assessment data, this is giving the school a more up-to-date picture of each student's achievement and progress. The school is looking forward to collecting enough data over time so it can track student progress longitudinally, individually, by class and grade, and measure not only whether students make progress but whether they make the progress of which they are capable.

The school checks closely the achievement and progress of special education students and English language learners and uses the data to make decisions about their needs.

Analysis by gender and ethnicity has identified some differential achievement which the school is investigating through the work of the inquiry, instructional and grade teams. It is starting to look closely at why the boys who achieve well in math do less well in English language arts and conversely why the girls, who do well in English language arts, achieve less well in math. The school compares its overall performance against those in its peer group and so knows how well it is doing in comparison with similar schools overall. It does not yet look more deeply into the data to see whether it can learn from other school's successes in particular aspects, for example, from schools which have successfully closed the gender gap in English language arts and math.

**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 proficient.**

The school has general goals to drive school improvement. These are not always objectively measurable and so cannot be used strategically to drive the school's action planning. Until this year, the school has not had enough timely assessment data on which to base specific long-term and interim goals for student achievement. Action planning has therefore lacked the precision it needs to enable the school to measure its effectiveness. As a result, while goals are shared they are not as rigorously focused on improving student achievement and progress as they should be.

The monthly assessment data in English language arts and math enables teachers to set individual small-step goals for individual student achievement. Teachers share with students the analysis of answers to the test questions and agree with them their goals for the next unit of work. These are taken home for parents to see. As a result, students are clear about what they need to do to move up a level. The school does not yet set differential long-term and interim goals for each grade and class, based on student achievement, because the collection of such detailed data is new. Assessment data informs whether special education students and English language learners receive push-in or pull-out services. A range of after-school tutoring and Saturday academy classes gives additional support. The school now has additional after-school classes to try to move students from Levels 1 and 2 to Levels 2 and 3 respectively.

Parents are kept informed through regular report cards and parent/teacher conferences. Parent association meetings always have an interpreter for Spanish, and more recently Polish, and newsletters are translated into Spanish. The school's open-door policy means that parents can meet with the principal or staff quickly if not immediately.

**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 proficient.**

In response to assessment data the school adjusted its curriculum map for English language arts and math at the beginning of this school year. Data from monthly assessments enables teachers to make ongoing adjustments to the map and pacing

calendars to respond more closely to student need. Skills item analysis is enabling teachers to focus on those skills where students need most help when planning lessons. Some subject teams are beginning to meet to identify suitable opportunities when skills, knowledge and understanding taught in one subject can be reinforced and practiced in another. Some project work and first-hand investigative work brings learning alive and adds purpose and meaning to tasks. However, there are still some subject teams that do not work closely enough with core curriculum teachers to plan an even more relevant curriculum where all subjects support each other. All students receive gym, science and social studies classes during the year. The “talent classes” which include art, music, band and technology are open to only a few classes and not to all students. Art, band, computer, dance and a range of sporting activities are offered after school to give all students a choice. There is scope for the school to offer some or all of these subjects during the school day when the school restructures into three academies next year.

The school uses assessment data to put students into classes mostly according to their achievement level. This makes the planning of differentiated instruction easier in some cases. Many teachers use the data to plan work at different levels for students in lessons, or use differentiated questions to target individual responses. However, too often the lesson objective focuses on the task students will complete rather than the learning that will occur. As a result, in some classes students still complete the same work as their classmates even though some are ready to move on to harder and more challenging work. Many teachers think about how to make instruction interesting. In most classes partner work engages students in conversations and enables them to share ideas and support each other when working. Movie and music clips and Powerpoint presentations focus student attention. While new laptops carts will be available for student use as soon as teacher training is complete, the current computers are old and out of date and do not support learning sufficiently well. Many are lying unused about the school which makes some classrooms look untidy and does not set a tone conducive to learning. Homework is used well across the school to support learning in class.

Scheduling is made more difficult because the school shares the building with another school that needs access to the gym, auditorium and canteen during and after the school day. This has resulted in the teachers sharing rooms and having to travel as well as the students. This in turn means that the start of some lessons is not smooth because teachers have not had time to get resources ready.

There is no formal program to develop students’ personal development systematically. The guidance counselors and deans give suitable support and, alongside the close supervision provided by the assistant principals, this has reduced the number of suspensions this year. Good focus is given to maintaining and improving attendance figures. All staff have the attitude that “if students aren’t here, they can’t learn” and so rigorously follow up all absences and tardiness resulting in meeting its attendance goal.

**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 proficient.**

The principal visits classes and gives objective feedback on teachers’ instructional strengths and areas that could be improved. Many teachers act positively on this

feedback and seek training and support from colleagues to improve their practice. The information is shared with coaches so they can offer additional professional development in the form of guidance, modeling lessons or providing additional resources and opportunities to visit other teachers' classes. Professional development has focused this year on the effective use of data to inform instruction mainly through improved curriculum planning. There are now plans to focus training on ways to differentiate learning activities in all classes to make sure they build on previous achievement and wide range of knowledge and skills students have already acquired. Teachers meet regularly in grade subject teams to review their work and to reflect on the effectiveness of the curriculum and instruction on learning as measured by student performance on the monthly tests. This is more established in English language arts, math and social studies than in other content areas. The many teachers who are new to the school this year have found this collaboration supportive and that it has helped them to meet the school's higher instructional expectations more quickly.

The guidance counselors operate an open-door policy for students to talk to them about a range of issues both academic and personal. Special education students and English language learners receive the services they need to raise their achievement. Currently, the assistant principals are too involved in the day-to-day management of student behavior. The open-door policy means that some teachers and staff rely too much on them to sort out problems that they themselves can and should deal with. This gives the assistant principals too little time to focus on their instructional leadership role and to attend planned cabinet meetings. A varied range of after school activities is made available through the support of many local community-based organizations.

**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 underdeveloped with proficient features.**

At classroom level, systems for using data from monthly, Acuity and predictive tests to monitor student progress and for adjusting programs, interventions, curriculum maps and pacing calendars are all in place. This has improved the way that teachers plan for differentiated instruction in class. The inquiry and instructional leadership teams meet regularly to analyze assessment data and discuss feedback from teachers to inform the next stages of curriculum planning and whether interventions are as effective as they could be. Whole school systems for monitoring and reviewing the school's work are less formal and, as a result, sometimes planned meetings do not take place.

Teachers welcome the support they get and the freedom to get on with the job of teaching. They value the invitation to give feedback, especially to offer views and thoughts about the restructuring of the school into three academies. Currently, the restructuring team's discussions focus too much on organizational matters which are not set within a clearly expressed vision of what the curriculum and effective learning will look like in each of the academies. As a result, there is too little guidance to give clear direction and shape to the school's future development. The school's strategic plan does not detail who will do what, how and by when, how the school knows when it has achieved what it has set out to do, and an objective means to measure whether it is on track to reach its goals.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: John Ericsson Middle School</b>	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>			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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X		

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					
			X		

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					
		X			

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>