



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

George Gershwin Intermediate School

Middle School 166

**800 Van Siclen Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11207**

Principal: Maria Ortega

Dates of review: March 27 - 28, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Barbara Kwiecinski

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

George Gershwin Intermediate School is a middle school with 573 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 80% Black, 18% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 26% 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 87%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 70% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has very comprehensive systems and structures in place that underpin all school activities that include goals and time scaled evaluation.
- The administration forms a cohesive team that collectively takes the school forward.
- The school effectively uses many data sources to understand the progress of students at individual, group, grade and subject level.
- Students respond very positively to consistency and challenge, resulting in high achieving students producing work of exceptional quality.
- The single gender classes have a positive impact on the academic and personal development of students.
- The principal is relentless in her care and support for each individual student and is very strategic in her budgeting which helps students reach their goals.
- Teacher assessment notebooks record individual progress over time and very effectively inform teacher planning.
- A very structured approach to lesson observation results in teachers receiving effective feedback and modifying their practice.
- Students are respectful of each other and proud of their achievements.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that the same high academic expectations, set by most teachers are evidenced in all classrooms.
- Continue to look for creative ways to involve parents in student learning.
- Continue to share best practice and ensure all teachers have the skills to address behavioral issues consistently.
- Extend the curriculum enabling all students to access music during the school day.

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 proficient.

The principal is dedicated to the school and her drive and determination is impacting positively on students' personal and academic achievement. The school population is challenging with many students entering with low levels of achievement. The principal works tirelessly to improve the curriculum on offer for all students. As a result, the curriculum is broad and engaging although, despite the recording studio and band, opportunities for curricular music are limited. This academic year, changes have been made to support the various subgroups within the school. These are having a positive impact and student progress is improving.

The school has many new teachers and there are very effective systems in place to support their development. Administration is very effective and is supporting teachers to cope with change. A very good lesson observation structure is in place where teachers receive written evaluations for both formal and informal feedback. This gives teachers the skills to use data to inform instruction and differentiate their lessons more effectively. The subgroup of students with disabilities did not make their annual measurable objective target for English language arts and math and consequently the school decided to departmentalize their special education program for all grades. This gives teachers the opportunity to focus on two curriculum areas rather than four in order to improve efficiency of delivery. In addition, opportunities to collaborate with partner teachers, results in the progress of students with the greatest need being tracked effectively.

High achieving students attend Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) classes. Students are challenged and respond very positively to high teacher expectations. Very good quality graded work is displayed in the hallways. However, although most teachers set these high expectations this is not consistent throughout the school. Single gender classes are in place in math and there is evidence of improved performance. Parents speak very positively of this initiative and feel that attitudes to learning have improved as a consequence. The parent coordinator is effective even though relatively few parents attend academic-based meetings at the school.

As a result of last year's review, systematic structures are in place to ensure that all school data systems inter-relate and progress is tracked more consistently. The inquiry team is targeting the lowest third of grade 6 students with the task of assisting to achieve grade level more quickly. The work of the group is developing and the focus is on improved reading comprehension and fluency, which are school priorities.

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 well developed.

The school understands the performance and progress of all students. It works tirelessly to use data more effectively and has identified that the progress of some students is not improving quickly enough. As a result of data analysis, students are grouped in either homogeneous or heterogeneous classes in accordance to their need. The school carefully tracks the input of all interventions. If they are not having positive impact, it makes adjustments. The appointment of a data specialist is very positive and teachers receive good support to understand the new data collection systems. High-achieving students respond well to the AVID classes and speak very positively about recent curriculum changes. Integrated Algebra Regents is available and higher-level math is further enriched through a collaborative partnership with a High School. This has a very positive impact on students' progress and is directly in response to the school's understanding of performance of groups of students in the school. The underperformance of boys in math is an issue. The single sex classes are having a very positive effect and male teachers speak with pride of being positive male role models.

Special education students receive targeted support and the appointment of four new academic intervention teachers, results in students receiving focused instruction appropriate to need. Students enjoy working in small classes and the individual attention they receive. The on-going adjustments to their individual education plans, results in students making substantial gains. Targets are in place in all curriculum areas for the coming year and the school is confident that the more coherent tracking linked to the high number of interventions will result in school making average yearly progress.

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 Comprehensive Education Plan is a living document and drives the school forward. It is developed collaboratively and goals are set after intensive data analysis for subjects, grades and subgroups. These are shared with all staff and guide curriculum decision making. The drive to meet average yearly progress is a major priority and strategies to improve the performance of all students in English language arts and math are in place. The assistant principal with responsibility for math works very hard with administration to analyze periodic data, set goals and plan instructional programs in math. Interim data shows that math results are improving. All students have math portfolios with rubrics. These are of high quality and define interim- and long-term goals. Students ably explain how to make improvement. Teachers use assessment notebooks very effectively to record conference notes and track individual progress on a daily basis in both English language arts and math. This accurate recording, results in greater challenge and improved progress of students. Model classrooms give excellent examples of expectations, organization and positive learning environments. As a result, high expectations are set in most classes, but this is not consistent across the school, although students describe lessons as "challenging with increased teacher expectations". The departmentalization of special education students gives teachers the opportunity to

discuss progress across subject areas and identify strategies that help students to meet their goals. In the large majority of lessons teachers set high expectations, where this is not the case students do not meet their targets.

The parent coordinator is a very good mediator who works extremely well with parents on a one to one basis. She acts as an intermediary who helps before teachers become involved in problems. The school communicates effectively with parents and goals are shared but at present only a small core of parents attend academic-based meetings. Collaborative activities are better attended. The school is trying very hard to raise its community profile through the East New York Beacon program and community outreach.

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.

This year, there are many curriculum changes as for the last three years students' progress "flat lined". Core Knowledge is in place in all grades and effectively links social studies and art. Students describe this positively and like the interdisciplinary relationship. Consequently, students produce high quality work. In a good social studies lesson special education students critique their colleagues' presentations and ask appropriate questions against a clearly defined rubric. In this lesson, the teacher very positively encourages students who have difficulty with their reading. Students welcome this support and feel well respected. The principal continually asks students about their progress. This positive encouragement results in students feeling valued as she knows all their names, interests hobbies, strengths and weaknesses. The number of suspensions is dramatically reduced and conflict mediation helps students to understand their feelings and actions. The school environment is now safe and nurturing and behavior in hallways is good.

The principal is very creative in her budgeting. The school restructuring means class size is reduced and students receive more individualized instruction. The use of technology is extending, students enjoy lessons that are interactive and fun. As a result, engagement is high as is progress. In an all male math lesson, students enjoy simplifying expressions by combining like terms. The timed activity results in a purposeful atmosphere and the teacher ably uses the smart board to manipulate number visually. In the vast majority of lessons, students are engaged, respectful and enjoy their work. There are many examples where students flourish and produce work of high quality. Where there is a lack of respect for students and lessons are not sufficiently challenging, students exhibit inappropriate behavior. Administration challenges this and where weaknesses are identified positive support is put in place. Teachers continue to share techniques and use data effectively to differentiate activities. In a 7th grade English language arts lesson, students gain insight into the cultural context and characteristics of a time period to enhance appreciation of text. The collaborative group work gives students the opportunity to share their strengths and challenge similar ability students.

Students respond very positively to the variety of after school activities and the collaboration with community-based organizations has a positive impact on students' academic progress. The newly formed marching band is exceptional. Students are very proud of the band and their confidence, concentration and musical ability is improved. The recording studio allows students to compose their own music. Collaboration is good and compositions are of high quality. The school appreciates that music links closely to literacy and math and is a tool to improve students' performance. At present, the full time instrumental teacher can only target small numbers of students during the school day. Students regret this and see the value of music for all.

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 well developed.

One of the school's three goals is to continue to provide professional development that will help teachers extend their use of data to target student performance at individual, group and class level. To this end, 60% of all professional development in faculty, department and grade meetings focuses on data analysis. This links to the outcomes of new curriculum initiatives. Staff welcome this support and describe how they modify instruction as a result of better data understanding. The professional development team survey faculty three times each school year, resulting in individual teacher plans related to need with defined goals. Administration keeps very thorough records on observation and analysis of teacher need. Effective feedback improves the quality of instruction.

The United Federation of Teachers center is a hub of professional development. The coaches and the teacher center specialist work very closely with administration. Collectively they support colleagues effectively in development areas identified after formal, informal and walk-through observations. Opportunities are available for intervisitations and this happens across grades as well as within grades. At grade level meetings, teachers plan collaboratively and effectively and share their observations. They compare the effectiveness of strategies on different student groups, resulting in improved instruction. New teachers feel well supported. The principal, who sees new teacher development as a growth area, seeks to ensure that the differentiated support the school offers results in more stability in terms of teacher retention.

The school runs smoothly. Parents are proud of this and say prior to the principal's appointment they were afraid to send their students to the school.

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 proficient.

The school is collaborative and the school leadership team, cabinet and professional development team analyze trend data in order to revise goals and set new action plans. All available data is used. The school uses interim assessments, Direct Reading Assessment (DRA), Princeton Review report and Acuity to compare student performance by class, grade and at individual level to track performance in English language arts and math on an on-going basis. In addition the impact of new initiatives is tracked. High- and low-achieving students are gaining from a curriculum more appropriate to their need.

The lesson observation structure is very good and is continually refined. The many examples of excellent learning environments result in most teachers refining their practice for the benefit of the students. The specialized classes for the high achieving students, the re-organization of special education support and the single gender classes are all examples of strategic decisions to improve student outcomes. Goal setting in math and English language arts is good and the school it is currently considering plans for all students have action plans across all subjects.

The principal has drive and determination and believes that the supportive caring environment and the increased use of data will help teacher and students to make significant gains.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: George Gershwin Intermediate School	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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 ...	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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 ...	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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 . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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