



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Alejandra Benitez de Gautier School

Elementary School 377

**200 Woodbine Street
Brooklyn
NY 11221**

Principal: Dominic Zagami

Dates of review: June 3 – 4, 2008

Lead Reviewer: John Hudson

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

Overall evaluation

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

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Alejandra Benitez de Gautier School is an elementary school with 854 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 7. The school population comprises 18% Black, 79% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian and other students. The student body includes 19% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 91.5%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 82.5% eligibility.

The school completes its transformation to a combined elementary and middle school next September with the inclusion of grade 8 students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The highly effective principal leads the school with vision and sensitivity towards the achievement of ambitious and achievable long-term goals.
- Administrators and faculty use data well to update their understanding of the progress of students, classrooms and sub groups.
- The school has established effective routines for identifying students at greatest risk and providing suitable interventions to accelerate progress.
- Very effective training and management systems enable teachers to gather and use data to inform their planning and instruction.
- Teachers and administrators collaborate well to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals and develop plans and time frames to meet them.
- Leaders and faculty continuously refine a broad and engaging curriculum, including arts and technology, in a positive, safe and inclusive environment.
- Teachers use data well to plan challenging differentiated instruction which meets the needs of individual students and enables them to progress well.
- Carefully considered professional development plans are based on demanding performance goals for students, teachers and leaders.
- School leaders make effective use of classroom observations and performance data to target training and meet the needs of every teacher.
- Frequently measured data is used routinely to review school improvement plans and make carefully considered but timely refinements as required.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend peer-evaluation among teachers to establish a culture of highly effective classroom leadership further throughout the school.
- Continue to explore innovative ways of involving all parents in enhancing their children's learning and progress.
- Ensure all students share the principal's high expectations of academic and personal progress for every student.

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.

Administrators provide very effective management systems and relevant training to enable teachers to gather and use data. School leaders and faculty make very good use of data to maintain a continuously updated and objective understanding of the progress of students, classrooms, grade levels and sub groups. They do so with particular emphasis on English language learners, ethnic groups and students who are struggling. Teachers and administrators use data collaboratively to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improving student performance. Goals have associated improvement plans and time frames to meet them. The school identifies students at greatest risk. Teachers and leaders provide suitable interventions which impact on learning and accelerate progress. The majority of parents are fully involved in supporting their children and enhancing their learning and progress. Leaders are exploring alternative ways of involving all parents. The school community welcomes and supports the principal's high expectations of academic and personal progress for every student. However, a minority of students are not committed to improving their own personal growth.

Leaders and faculty have created and continuously refine a broad and engaging curriculum, including arts and technology. The learning environment is positive, safe and inclusive. Teachers use data well to plan challenging instruction which is differentiated to meet the needs of individual students. This enables them to learn effectively and progress towards their goals. Carefully considered professional development plans, based on student achievement data, are designed to improve teacher effectiveness and raise student achievement. Administrators use classroom observations and performance data to identify teachers' needs and target training accordingly. There is a developing culture of effective classroom leadership throughout the school. This encourages some teachers to evaluate each other's planning and instructional practices. Not all teachers take advantage of this effective means to improve their repertoire of essential teaching skills. The school routinely measures data to review school improvement plans and monitor their effectiveness. This enables administrators and teachers to make carefully considered but timely refinements to improve plans as required. The principal, who is highly effective, leads the school with vision and sensitivity. He is driving the school towards the achievement of ambitious and achievable long-term goals.

The school has made very good progress in all areas identified for improvement in the previous Quality Review report. The inquiry team has made considerable headway in establishing why a group of grade 5 students made little improvement over a one year period in English language arts. The team has enabled ninety percent of the focus group to move up one level in this subject over the past year.

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.

Administrators, including a new assistant principal with responsibility for data management, provide constructive training and coaching to enable teachers to use data systems very effectively. In addition to training in the use of the Acuity data management system the school introduced substantially revised teachers' data binders. Teachers now have easy access to a wealth of regularly updated data on student achievement. Teachers find these to be particularly valuable. "We use running records, conferencing notes and our own observations together with other information in our data binders to plan student groups and differentiate our instruction." Teachers also note, "Administrators attend regular grade meetings and are always available to help when needed."

School leaders and faculty use achievement data to maintain a continuously updated and objective understanding of student progress. They do this for individual students as well as classrooms, grade levels and sub groups. Groups of particular interest include English language learners, who comprise approximately 20% of student enrollment, ethnic groups and students who are struggling. Sub groups of Hispanic students include some with interrupted education backgrounds. The principal and faculty track the progress of these students with particular care. They monitor the impact of instruction and interventions on their subsequent performance.

Leaders compare the school's performance and progress with other schools to identify very good practice. Administrators and faculty visit those schools whose practices they emulate. Visits to middle schools over recent years have contributed to decisions on the continuing implementation of middle school grades in the school. One visit led to the school's adoption of an open and readily accessible cabinet style of leadership.

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 well developed.

Teachers and administrators meet regularly and use data collaboratively to monitor student progress against rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improving student performance. Goals have associated improvement plans and time frames to meet them. Teachers routinely confer with students and help them develop strategies to meet their goals. The school has established highly effective strategies for identifying students at greatest risk and providing suitable interventions which impact on learning and accelerate their progress. The inquiry team identified a group of grade 5 Hispanic students who had made no progress over a one year period in English language arts. The team developed a regular pull-out program for these students to improve their fluency and comprehension. As a result of this intervention, ninety percent of the focus group has moved up one level in this subject over the past year. The team is reviewing ways of identifying sub groups such as this one to implement more timely improvement strategies.

The school has worked very effectively since the previous Quality Review to reach out to more parents. The majority of parents are fully involved in supporting their children and enhancing their learning and progress. The parent coordinator set up a male role model program for fathers, "My hero and me". One father who attended this nine-week program commented, "My son was having a hard time understanding. Now I am able to spend time with him, helping him out." The school community welcomes and supports the principal's high expectations of academic and personal progress for every student. Most students respond by working hard towards their personal and academic goals. They are motivated further by prominent displays of good quality student work that adorn walls throughout the building. A small minority of students remain uncommitted, however. The school is seeking ways of raising their expectations and accelerating their progress.

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 well developed.

Leaders and faculty have created and continuously refine a broad and engaging curriculum, including arts and technology. Students enjoy reading, especially stories they can relate to. Some students found that independent reading was not always interesting, saying there was not much variety to choose from. Since then, the school has responded to this and, as one student stated, "Teachers bought a whole load of new books." A large number of students use after school time for their own reading. Students in one grade 6 classroom were strongly attracted by the book *Night John*, which they considered superior to the movie of the book. The clear emphasis on literacy is having a strong impact on learning across the curriculum and on student expectations.

Teachers work hard to ensure students benefit from a positive, safe and inclusive learning environment. Teachers use data well to plan challenging instruction which is differentiated to meet the needs of individual students. Learning takes place mainly through group work. Students find this approach to be very helpful. There is much evidence of differentiation in all classrooms. Differentiation occurs through a variety of modes including alternative learning activities, support for individuals and student-selected activities. For example, one class had a list of ten options for writing their book reports. These included writing a letter to the author, selling the book through a sixty second presentation, interviewing a character in the book and scripting the book for a movie. Such variety of activity, or the level of support given, enables students to own their learning and progress towards demanding goals. The principal bases decisions on use of school resources firmly on school goals for student improvement. Priorities include building comprehensive classroom libraries and maintaining class sizes at near optimum levels.

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.

Carefully considered professional development plans, based on student achievement data, are designed to improve teacher effectiveness and raise student achievement. For example, leaders have identified a need to improve reading progress in all grades. As a result, libraries have been expanded and teachers trained to make most effective use of

them. Plans to improve vocabulary building and understanding are also prioritized. The school develops plans to support existing systems and the introduction of new programs and procedures. These include training to make effective use of Acuity and data binders, using the State science initiative and preparation for the next phase of middle school development. School leaders make effective use of frequent classroom walkthrough observations and performance data to target training to meet the needs of every teacher.

There is a developing culture of effective classroom leadership throughout the school. This encourages some teachers to evaluate each other's planning and instructional practices and actively explore best classroom procedures. This is already impacting on student progress through the shared use of specific differentiated instruction processes, for example. Other teachers do not take advantage of this effective means to improve their range of classroom practices, however. Teachers who are new to the school or the profession find the level of support "extremely helpful". They report that the induction program enables them to improve their planning and instruction. In addition to mentoring, teachers enjoy and benefit from their "easy access to the principal and assistant principals".

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.

The school routinely measures data to review school improvement plans and monitor their effectiveness. This enables administrators and teachers to make carefully considered but timely refinements to improve plans as required. For example, reading development is a top priority and teachers use a range of strategies to promote it. Goals range from numbers of pages read in 30 minutes to the number of books read per week. One consequence of the great success of this initiative has been the need to expand classroom libraries substantially. The pleasure given through this reading initiative to many students throughout the school is palpable. Teachers and leaders are taking action to retain reading progress made by some struggling readers over the long summer break. The school has organized a visit to a major bookstore where students will be able to buy books. The school has planned opportunities for these students to come into school on specified days during the summer break to encourage their reading and celebrate their ongoing achievements.

The principal, who is highly effective, focuses strongly on the needs of learners. He leads the school with vision and sensitivity. Decisions are based on sound evidence and all members of the school community are warmly encouraged to participate in the school's continuing drive to future successes. Supported by a very strong cabinet and an enthusiastic and talented faculty, the principal is driving the school towards the achievement of ambitious and achievable long-term goals.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Alejandrina Benitez de Gautier School	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