



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Sunset Park Preparatory School**

**Middle School 821**

**4004 4 Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11232**

**Principal: Lola Padin**

**Dates of review: March 24 - 25, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Helen Donnellan**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Sunset Park Preparatory School is a middle school with 466 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 10% Black, 77% Hispanic, 4% White, and 8% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 93.9%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 82% eligibility.

The numbers of students have risen from 430 to 466 since the start of the 2006-2007 school year. There are now two self-contained and three collaborative team teaching (CTT) classes for special education classes. Eleven teachers new to the profession joined the faculty in September 2007.

The school is located on the upper two floors of a shared site, with the lower floors occupied by another middle school. The shared gymnasium, cafeteria and auditorium are all located on the first floor.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school gathers extensive formal and informal data at subject, grade and student level to give a balanced picture of student performance.
- The school has used data well to gain deeper understanding of variations in the performance of different ethnic and gender groups.
- Teachers use data to plan classes, which are based upon the needs and interests of their students.
- Arts are valued as a significant part of the curriculum and provide students with opportunities to develop a wide range of skills and knowledge.
- Staff work hard to keep parents informed about students' life at school and how they are progressing.
- The principal shares her high expectations for instruction and learning with staff, students and parents.
- The administrative team and coaches provide extensive support and professional development for new and inexperienced teachers.
- Data is used routinely to monitor and revise plans to ensure that students continue to make progress.

### What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all instruction is sufficiently compelling to hold the students' interest and engage them in purposeful learning activities.
- Inject greater rigor into classroom observations and feedback, and Increase opportunities for staff to share their expertise and good practice.
- Ensure that professional development links explicitly to whole school priorities as well as individual needs.
- Continue to support staff so that they become more confident and competent in analyzing and using data.
- Explore ways to define teachers' goals, which make clear specific actions they need to take to develop their expertise and achieve school priorities.
- Review behavior management procedures, develop a consistent approach for maintaining good order and establish a culture where students feel secure throughout their time in school.

## 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 well developed.**

The principal leads a large cabinet and makes clear that the mission of the school is for students to achieve at high levels. Data is routinely gathered and analyzed by coaches who share information on how students are progressing. Some teachers depend on coaches' analyses of data rather than analyzing information themselves. Staff support each other so that they make good use of data for planning their instruction to focus on the needs of students. The school's priorities for the year are clear but are not broken down sufficiently to show what different teachers need to do for those priorities to be achieved. The cabinet routinely reviews information to modify and adapt intervention that is not making the optimum impact. Comparisons with other schools are underused as a means of identifying the school's strengths and potential areas for improvement.

Coaches provide extensive professional development, but how this links to whole-school priorities is not always explicit. Significant efforts are made to support new teachers and enable them to become successful. The curriculum is varied and most teachers are effective in engaging students through lively instruction. There is a high level of respect between staff and students, but not all students feel safe in shared areas of the building because there is currently no agreed protocol for managing poor behavior.

The focus of the inquiry team links with one of the areas for improvement from the last Quality Review. The team pinpointed a group of lower-achieving students, which includes a number of students from different ethnic groups. The work so far has identified possible curriculum strands that are not matched closely to the needs of these students in order to boost their performance. Another area to improve was the use of technology; the purchase of additional computers and increased use of the technology room. Not all staff are fully confident in using SMART boards for instruction and learning. The third area focused on increasing the confidence of staff to use data. The introduction of Acuity and Scantron has led to staff gaining more experience in using these assessment tools. This is an area still needing development, as not all staff are confident to use data extensively without support.

### **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.**

Staff and administrators have a clear picture of student progress and performance as formal and informal assessments in math and English language arts are drawn together by coaches. This is then examined to identify patterns and trends in outcomes. Some teachers use other tools and computer analyses to examine this information in even greater depth and then pinpoint aspects of their subject where students need additional instruction. The academic intervention team tracks the progress of special education students, paying particular attention to progress in reading, as this underpins successful learning in other subjects.

The school uses data well to gain a deeper understanding of variations in the performance of different ethnic and gender groups. The percentage of students not using English as a first language at home is 46%, which is far higher than the 11% of formally-identified English language learners and often limits the opportunities for students to practice English and widen their vocabulary at home. The school is now considering how to develop programs to better support these students. Comparisons with other schools are currently limited to analyses provided by the City and the school has not sought other opportunities to identify strengths and weaker areas in other schools with similar populations.

The coaches give staff support in analyzing and understanding data to encourage them to apply it to their planning as a matter of routine. While some teachers use data in sophisticated ways to extend the work provided by coaches, others lack confidence or skills in using data without support or analyses provided by their colleagues.

**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.**

The principal works closely with a large cabinet. In addition, the whole staff meet monthly and teachers collaborate at their formal and informal meetings so that information can be shared across the faculty. The cabinet, math and English language arts staff each have separate meetings weekly in which information is regularly shared. In other subjects, informal meetings are the usual way for staff to share data and plan together, as three formal meetings are scheduled for the whole year.

Staff are aware of whole-school goals, but as these are not broken down into specific subject or class plans, their contribution to whole-school performance and priorities is less clear. Teachers work hard to identify the academic needs of their students and use appropriate data to set goals. They now use results from previous tests to group students in math with the aim of increasing their performance. It is too early for the outcomes of this initiative to be known.

The principal shares her high expectations for instruction and learning with staff, students and parents. A high number of parents attend the regular parent-teacher conferences, which gives them detailed information on their children’s progress and the next units they need to master. Students know what they need to achieve through feedback from their teachers and charts in classrooms showing goals for test results. Teachers work hard to maintain regular contact with families through informal contacts and welcome insights from parents about their children’s learning.

**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.**

The curriculum meets mandated requirements and enables teachers to track student progress and performance well. The core subjects are enhanced by an extensive range of arts subjects, which all students have access to throughout the school year. The principal encourages staff to be innovative and creative in delivering the mandated curriculum and examples of this were evident during the review. In a lively music class, the teacher skillfully increased the level of challenge as students had to identify different characteristics within two pieces of jazz music.

Teachers used a variety of ways to differentiate content effectively in some classes observed during the review. Some teachers are adept at making spontaneous changes to their planned classes to differentiate content, teach a point in a different way or exploit an unforeseen learning moment, which holds student interest and enhances learning. In others, not all students remained active and focused and opportunities for learning were lost as instruction failed to engage students’ interest.

The administrative team reviews teachers’ planning weekly as part of systems for making teachers accountable. They challenge underperformance and provide extra staffing in classes where this occurs while at the same time, making clear the need for improvement.

Students spoke positively about the school, the range of programs available to them and the caring and supportive staff. All of these contribute significantly to the purposeful atmosphere within the school. A group of students agreed with the comment, “At this school people actually care and actually do something to help.” Staff and students treat each other with respect and displays of student work in hallways are treated well, indicating respect for fellow students as well as their work. Students feel safe within the school’s sections of the building, but less secure when moving to shared areas.

**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 is clear that she wants all staff and students to be learners, which underpins the professional development activities provided to improve instruction. A third of the teachers are new to the profession or inexperienced so the administrative team and coaches provide them with a significant additional support to help them deliver effective instruction. Support for all teachers is determined by outcomes of earlier observations or low student achievement results.

There is no explicit link between whole-school goals and professional development to support the whole staff in delivering the school priorities. Nor is there a process encouraging staff to reflect on their professional development, identify what they will apply in their instruction and to record the changes coaches or administrators will observe. Some teachers feel that feedback following observations does not provide them with sufficient information about their strengths and areas to improve. The teachers encourage each other and are eager to develop their professional skills. They give mutual support through informal dialogues but formal sharing of effective practice is not fully exploited as

a source of professional learning. This means that strong practice is not always applied across the school.

Some new teachers showed skill in managing their classes, providing students with thought-provoking questions and adapting their instruction to meet students' needs. In such classes, students are well occupied and so remain on task, which reduces the likelihood of disruptive behavior. Professional development in raising classroom practice is still a priority as not all instruction is of this standard.

During the review, the school ran smoothly during classes, transfer and recess times and students' behavior showed that they are aware of the expectations. However, there has been an increase in the number of suspensions in the current year owing to lapses in behavior. A changed approach for dealing with such situations was tested in the fall of 2007, but found to be unsuitable. The school has not yet agreed a new protocol for maintaining good order that can be consistently applied.

**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 cabinet meets weekly to review the week's activity, share outcomes of their observations and review plans and interventions to ensure that learning continues to be effective. When information shows that particular approaches are no longer having the desired impact, school leaders make changes to either modify or discontinue them without undue delay. This applies to academic interventions and wider aspects of school life, such as the decision to discontinue the trial of different strategies to manage behavior.

Teachers review student progress through regular informal assessments to verify learning from a unit or subject area. This is done with a combination of mini-tests and light-hearted activities such as quizzes, which keeps students engaged in the subject at the same time as yielding important information.

The school's priorities for the school year are contained in the principal's performance review. These reflect the areas to improve arising from the 2006-2007 Quality Review and indicate a percentage increase in each of the three areas. The figures are not broken down to indicate what this means for each teacher or grade, so teachers are not clear about how their work fits into whole-school goals. There are no plans that define outcomes and interim steps for teachers' professional development, so monitoring of their progress is not against known benchmarks.

Each year student numbers increase and the cabinet is planning the changes needed to deal with the increase for 2008-2009 and meet the needs of existing students and staff.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Sunset Park Preparatory</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.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .</b>	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.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .</b>	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.**

<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	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	

**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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					
			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	
<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>