



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Ella Baker School

Middle School 225

**317 East 67 Street
New York
NY 10065**

Principal: Laura Garcia

Dates of review: May 5 - 6, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Andy McClean

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

The Ella Baker School is a public school with 279 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 37% Black, 47% Hispanic, 10% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 -2007 was 92%.

The Ella Baker School was founded in 1996 by a group of teachers from Central Park East. As a consequence of its small size, the school seeks to understand its children within an intimate environment. Teachers work with students for two consecutive years. The school shares the building with other schools in the Julia Richman Complex in East Manhattan.

The school is designated an Empowerment School by the New York Department of Education. Empowerment schools have more flexibility to make decisions and control the resources for their school community. They are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose schools to affiliate with and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements. Another feature of Empowerment Schools, including this one, is participating in a research project to design its own periodic assessment processes.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal shares a very clear vision with the whole school community to create a challenging learning environment.
- Collection and use of a wide variety of data ensures good planning and differentiation of instruction.
- A climate of mutual trust is evident in all facets of school life and this leads to positive student attitudes and behavior.
- Teachers use their in-depth knowledge of students to ensure inclusion within a safe and secure environment.
- The school provides a wide curriculum centered on core literacy skills and successfully enhanced by many opportunities for art, music and poetry.
- A good system of communication with parents results in active support for their children's learning.
- Focused professional development results in teachers' greater confidence in planning and instruction of math.
- Collegial reflection by the faculty embodies their enthusiasm to innovate and learn from peers.
- Regular individual feedback to students on progress enables them to understand areas for improvement and how to achieve them.
- All staff receive focused support and guidance from administration and mentors.

What the school needs to improve

- Rationalize current data to prioritize areas of challenge in student learning and methods of instruction.
- Further develop programs of inter-grade visitation to share instructional practice and provide continuity of experiences for children.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

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

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The principal communicates her vision of an inclusive, child-centered education to all faculty, parents and students. Concentration on the collection of a wide range of data results in teachers' intimate knowledge of current student performance. The administration is aware of the need to examine the current volume of data collected and whether any duplication exists. Students themselves appreciate their teachers' understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. Regular conferences with individual students, as well as their families, lead to student belief in their teachers' desire to help them succeed. The curriculum centers on basic literacy and math. Many further opportunities within the curriculum lead to greater student motivation and interest. Employment of art and media arts teachers leads to vibrant and colorful displays within school. Examples of student poetry, writing and artwork affirm the wide variety of student talent. All teachers plan for a number of practical activities in all aspects of school life. Younger students visit New York City zoos. Their older peers have opportunities to record and play their own music in a local recording studio. School leaders successfully initiate a meaningful dialogue with colleagues to enable their comprehension of a continuum of learning and their role to ensure continuity of learning. As a result of this understanding, teachers take many opportunities to plan together and discuss the effectiveness of their instruction. The principal selects staff who share in the school's philosophy of constructing a dialogue with all students. The school accepts the need to develop further inter-grade partnerships. This is in keeping with strategic goals to better disseminate the best instruction seen in school. Special education students receive effective support from a wide variety of sources both in and out of school.

Good systems of parental communication exist, including informative weekly newsletters. These allow parents an immediate update on what teachers plan for their children and the activities in which they participate. Workshops for parents give them an understanding of both subject content and instructional methods. Very positive action research by the inquiry team into number strands continues as an area of inquiry by the school. This leads to staff comprehension of successful instruction in math that is applicable to the whole curriculum. Inter-grade scrutiny of tests data led by the team advances teachers' comprehension of students' past results and their next steps. Students enjoy opportunities to investigate. Models made to examine length of human intestines intrigue kindergarten children.

Good progress against areas for improvement from the last Quality Review has resulted in consistent tracking of all student progress through use of a primary learning record. Math instruction and progress continues to improve as a result of a strategic action plan. This plan contains interim measures to verify progress. Focused professional development within the last academic year concentrated on greater differentiation and continuity in math instruction.

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.

A wide variety of data enables teachers to gain a deep understanding of their students. From formal tests and informal quizzes and notes, teachers provide students and their parents with regular progress reports. Extended development of the primary learning record results in teacher's comprehension of children's progress in math, English language arts and science. With regular dialogue, students discuss the next steps in their learning and talk about how they can achieve the goals set for them. The principal accepts a need to examine in depth the volume of data produced in school and whether all such data makes a meaningful impact on student learning. The school seeks to assess whether data collected in the past now has the same relevance to today's challenges. Teachers use data in depth to plan instruction. Differentiation of activity and questioning results form a solid appreciation of differences in achievement of all students from their data. Students remain with a teacher for two years. This enables very good tracking of progress, supported by reviewing portfolios of work at interim points in each student's school life in that class. Special education students receive ongoing focused support and intervention. Dedicated staff, build positive relationships with students to address their needs. The number of English language learners is small, however, they receive good support to ensure their inclusion.

Study of math data results in concentration on training and development to improve instruction. Management systems and structures greatly assist teachers in their interpretation of results. Visits to similar schools occur frequently. Mentors make a significant contribution to ensure teachers, particularly those new to the profession, not only collect data but use it to improve instruction for all groups of students.

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

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

Collaboration among teachers is well established. Support from mentors and senior staff ensures a regular dialogue about instruction takes place. Teachers meet weekly to share ideas and plan future activities. They use a variety of methods to collect data on student performance that enables them to make regular measurements of progress. Teachers plan in grade cohorts on a weekly basis. This leads to a deeper understanding of next steps for students learning and teacher's planning, along with specific focus on special education students and high achievers. A school strategic action plan exists to address issues identified through data scrutiny. Teachers understand this plan's content and make regular contributions to update it. There is a well-developed teaching and learning committee that communicates progress towards the school goals to all faculty members. Modifications to goals and adaptations to instruction are subject to detailed discussion by teachers and mentors.

Regular meetings with students and family conferences enable students and their parents to understand the high expectations the school has of them. At family conferences,

teachers expect students to explain their progress and next steps to parents. This well-established two-way sharing of information contributes to the culture of trust and mutual respect evident in school. Parents participate eagerly in math workshops that enable them to understand the methods of instruction that teachers use with their children. These also help them to provide better support at home. Students and parents appreciate the extra hours their teachers put in on their behalf. Very well developed communication exists between teachers and parents who have all chosen to participate fully in the school's culture of experiential 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.

Successful efforts to improve the school's primary learning record enhance the quality of interim data on all students. Teachers use this data to set challenging goals for students, as well as to plan and modify instruction. Teachers assess student learning in math, reading and science on a regular basis throughout the year. Collaboration between staff, with well-structured professional development support, leads to common approaches to instruction. The school's strategic goal to improve math instruction and test results is a good example of the way data is used to track and target specific students. Such students, identified as at risk, receive focused support and guidance. The curriculum focuses on improvement of basic literacy and math skills. Within these areas, teachers plan for as many practical, hands-on experiences as possible. Grade 1 and 2 students take great delight in comparing each other's shoe size in an investigation on measurement. Well-planned questioning by teachers provides differentiation and depth of challenge to students in all classes. The faculty provides continuity allowing students opportunities not just to deliver factual answers, but to explain their reasoning as well.

Many activities both inside and outside the school day enhance student learning. Art, music and dance activities stimulate student motivation to learn. Rock climbing, swimming classes, photography classes and soccer coaching appeal to a wide range of student interests. This also contributes to the culture of mutual trust that pervades all school life. Students understand teachers' tenacity to help them improve as scholars and young people. Systems to address tardiness and poor attendance make a positive impact.

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.

The principal and administration use both formal classroom observations and informal walkthroughs and discussions to support improvement in instruction. The climate of professional trust and desire of all staff to learn from each other are evident in their planning, instruction and assessment of student work. Good progress in math instruction results from focused professional development. This links the improvement of both teachers' subject knowledge and continuity in approaches to the instruction of number strands. Teachers respond enthusiastically to guidance from administration and mentors. Though staff members are very capable and willing to work together, opportunities for inter-grade visitations are few. Cohort meetings to discuss same-grade work occur on a

regular and formal basis. School leaders understand the need to expand opportunities for inter-grade discussions and classroom visitations. Staff reflect on visits to similar schools and turnkey their findings to improve instruction. Teachers accept the need to share effective practice and do so in formal meetings and informal conversations. Teachers new to the school receive enthusiastic support from colleagues. More experienced teachers show great perception in their willingness to learn from new teachers and coaches. Guidance and support services meet regularly to assist students who have trouble in adapting to the school culture. Social workers, guidance counselors and the school psychologist work collaboratively with other staff to provide exemplary support for special education students. Programs such as yoga, rock climbing and camping trips occur each year. All contribute to the school's desire to leave "no stone unturned" to inspire and motivate student learning. Well-established systems of support, together with strong links with local businesses and arts networks, result in a calm, well-ordered learning community.

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 community's desire to improve the academic progress of its students stems from the principal's lucid portrayal of a school vision. Teachers and parents work with excellent team spirit and cooperation to ensure every student is happy and secure. All adults work diligently to know their students' current levels of performance through careful scrutiny of data. Conferences and one-to-one discussions with students provide regular feedback. This results in students' and parents' comprehension of what progress they have made and what their next steps will be. Furthermore, teachers take many opportunities to support each child's social and emotional development. Clear strategic goals, such as the desire to improve standards in reading and math, underpin school initiatives. Checks on progress toward them, carried out by both administration and teachers responsible for specific areas, result in change or acceleration as necessary. A stimulating curriculum linked with enthusiastic instruction empowers students to take ownership for their learning. Many opportunities for hands-on experiences and time to discuss findings lead to a maturity of attitude in students. Many students self-assess and re-plan goals and objectives, ably supported by their teachers.

The principal communicates a specific philosophy of education to everyone in school, where students participate thoughtfully and actively in making academic and social progress. The principal employs teachers who share this ethic. They join the school and receive material, professional and moral support and guidance to achieve this goal from like-minded colleagues. School leaders and staff participate in a regular debate about the best instruction and experience to realize full student potential. Complacency is unacceptable. The principal encourages the full involvement of teachers and students. At the same time, there is a clear expectation to strive for further improvement in student achievement.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Ella Baker 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