



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Independence School

Elementary School 234

**292 Greenwich Street
Manhattan
NY 10007**

Principal: Lisa Ripperger

Dates of review: November 1 - 2, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Peter Williman

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Independence is an elementary school with 752 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 6% Black, 7% Hispanic, 70% White, and 16% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance in 2006 – 2007 was 97.1%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding. The principal completed her first year at the school in August.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's clear vision and the analysis of data have enabled the school to refocus its goals in core subjects very effectively.
- The school functions as a collaborative learning community, responds well to new challenges and focuses very well on student achievement.
- The school has begun to establish very secure practices in the collection and use of detailed data to inform instruction.
- The school provides a very broad and stimulating curriculum in both core subjects and the arts.
- The school's very positive professional development strategies for all teachers impact very effectively at classroom, grade and whole school levels.
- Students concentrate very well because teachers are encouraging and work hard to plan and deliver stimulating lessons.
- The very positive school environment of trust and respect supports effective learning and instruction very well.
- Budget staffing and scheduling decisions support the school's goals very well.
- Parents' involvement in school is welcomed and this partnership adds valuable strands to the curriculum.

What the school needs to improve

- Document and schedule achievable, objectively measureable interim and final goals within whole school planning, based on student progress data .
- Schedule interim and final goals for professional development aligned to school goals.
- Continue to develop teachers' understanding and use of student progress data to set goals which are specific to students, classes, groups.
- Further improve the school's communication with parents to ensure curriculum developments are clearly understood and supported.
- Develop the use and integration of technology to broaden the curriculum further.

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 Independence is a very successful elementary school. Its students are high achieving. The principal has made good use her leadership and management skills to re-focus the work of the school during the past year. She has identified areas for improvement to student achievement using the administration's high quality data analysis. She has now begun to implement a set of effective strategic goals for school improvement. These have fully incorporated the improvement points of the previous review. As a result, a revised English language arts curriculum provides good quality information against which to monitor student progress. Teachers use this data well to plan next steps for learning in well-managed classrooms. There is consequently a strong work ethic, and students' understandings have been enriched. This is assisted by the school's policy to loop teachers with classes over two years. There has been insufficient time for the full impact of the implementation of the school's goals to be fully realized. Almost a third of classroom teachers are new to the school. Consequently, the administration, coaches and consultants work very hard and very effectively to provide professional development to new and established teachers. This professional development includes training related to new approaches and, when appropriate, support in understanding the content of the English language arts and math curricula. This is a work in progress.

The school improvement goals are well planned and strategic, but not documented to include timeframes for implementation. Goals are insufficiently connected with data to explicitly identify the expected outcomes and shifts in student achievement. As a result the school does not have specific criteria to measure and evaluate the pace and extent of its progress, although progress is clearly being made. The Inquiry Team has started its work and is helping to refine perceptions of student progress. The school offers a broad and rich curriculum, with the exception of technology. Parents assist through their additional funding to enrich instrumental music. However, while parents are fully supportive of the school, there are gaps in their understanding of instructional approaches and buy-in with some curricular goals, particularly in math.

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The assistant principal's high level of competence in data analysis enables the administration to have a well-informed overview of the patterns of student progress. The specific measurement of progress of individual students, classrooms and grades year-to-year is less well developed, and this omission limits the school's ability to include explicit

progress goals in whole school plans. The principal has made the proper judgment that rigorous analysis of student achievement is very important despite the school's record of high performance. This has alerted the school to some specific weaknesses in certain grades. The analysis has elicited gaps in the consistency of progress within and across even high-performing classes and grades. Differences in the progress of groups of students are now monitored carefully. The progress of the small number of English language learners is reviewed carefully. The principal uses data effectively to measure the school's performance against that of other schools, but is understandably frustrated by the lack of readily available hard data.

Teachers are beginning to maintain very good records in reading, writing and math to give a short and medium term overview of students' progress. The principal has identified the need to enhance teachers' skills in understanding students' reading levels and comprehension in English language arts and math. As a result of the very good support from the administration, and particularly the perceptive professional development work of the coaches, teachers are more able to assess students competently. They are now accurately identifying reading levels. Teachers use data of students' progress, and student conferences to plan specific steps for the students. Although teachers start the academic year with useful data about their students, they do not yet have a detailed statistical overview as part of their classroom record.

Special education students make good progress as a result of close monitoring. In order to increase the impact of the support for these students, the principal has made it a priority for special education students to be rigorously assessed. Improved communication between teachers and service providers is now in place and supporting the very detailed analysis work of the Pupil Personnel Team.

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

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school plans well and sets goals based on data for student improvement, but the expected outcomes of these plans are insufficiently explicit and documented. The full value that is added to student progress cannot be judged effectively because expected achievement targets are not quantified or related to time frames. This makes judgments of relative progress problematic. The administration used data to identify a weakness in reading progress in a younger class and inconsistent progress in the older grades. As a result, the principal has articulated a very clear four-year plan for school improvement. She has also introduced a number of well-focused school-wide targeted initiatives to accelerate learning. Professional development enhances teachers understanding of the math program to support high-quality instruction. These developments, which have been introduced with alacrity, are clearly improving the quality of work of teachers and students. However, although very supportive of the school and appreciative of the significantly increased opportunities for participation, some parents do not fully understand or support the nature of some school curriculum developments, particularly in math.

Teachers benefit from sharing their planning in grade team meetings. As a result of improved records, they know their students' progress well and plan next steps in learning very effectively. However, specific medium or long-term targets for individual students are not identified. The English language arts and math coaches are very influential in helping teachers refine their plans at classroom and grade levels. As a result students in grade 1 have been targeted effectively to raise reading achievement. The work of the inquiry team

complements the principal's strategy to ensure all students make expected progress. Students who reach state standards, but are not progressing in equal measure to their peers have been identified. Further analysis to determine appropriate support is progressing well.

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 overall curriculum offers students very good challenges and opportunities. The goals of the English language arts and math programs mesh well. They expand students' comprehension and thinking skills effectively. Students now read their math problems more skillfully. This allows them to elicit the true meaning before attempting to answer them. The art curriculum structures the progression of discrete skills well. All students study music. Thanks to the support of the parents' association, they have very good opportunities to learn a wide range of wind, brass and stringed instruments. The social studies curriculum is highly developed in structure. It provides cross-curricular connections with literacy, math, music and art. Some parents would like to see even greater depth of study. Technology is used in classes, but does not feature sufficiently strongly in the curriculum to make a significant impact. The principal has significantly improved the capacity of teachers to understand student progress. As a result, student progress in reading is more accurately identified and tracked. In math, there are now better assessment opportunities through short-term quizzes and interim tests. Improvements to the workshop methodology enable more refined teacher observations which lead to better planning for accelerating students' achievement. Curriculum calendars for each of the mandatory subjects are used well to monitor the pace of progress.

The principal's budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions firmly support her goals for school development. The increased number of smaller kindergarten classes greatly improves early instruction and learning. Special education students are better integrated and supported, thanks to the introduction of a collaborative team-taught kindergarten class and revision to scheduling of intervention work. The expanded team of coaches has increased the pace at which new initiatives are embedded. Teachers plan well-focused lessons which are differentiated for individual and group needs. Students are challenged by the work they are given, interested in it, and on keep on task. They feel well supported but the teachers. There is an environment of respect and trust. Classrooms are well managed, uncluttered and have accessible resources. The administration holds teachers strictly accountable for the match between planning, instruction, assessment and student outcomes. The close monitoring of the processes by the coaches strengthens this. Attendance is higher than the average for city schools. The principal is very effective in her efforts to target and reduce tardiness.

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 leadership gives good support to the professional development of the faculty. The leadership team is knowledgeable and skilled. They enrich their own development through their network of wider professional contacts. The principal, with her assistant principal and

coaches, knows teachers' strengths and needs in depth. They have well-focused strategies to support each teacher's progress within the context of the goals of the school. Each coach has clear development plans that are specific to their subject. These are focused on extending subject knowledge, instructional skills and data-driven instruction. The principal is highly observant. She works alongside teachers to provide perceptive feedback. As a result, teachers feel well supported. Teachers new to the profession and new to the school appreciate the detailed advice they receive. They make rapid progress in acquiring the school's processes and procedures for planning, assessment and recording. Teachers have good opportunities for observing each other, and for attending external courses. Grade meetings and individual discussions with coaches give many opportunities for teachers to reflect on and review their instruction.

Good systems are in place to support students' social and academic development. The recently created Pupil Personnel Team successfully supports the work of teachers and coordinates the intervention services to ensure students' needs are met efficiently. Consequently there have been revisions to 'push-in' and 'pull-out' to increase service provider contact with classroom work. Effective school procedures ensure the efficient day-to-day running of the school. Disciplinary matters are well managed. Recent changes to the morning routine now give students a useful time to settle before beginning school. After school enrichment programs, summer camps, art, dance and college affiliations further enhance the wealth of opportunities students enjoy.

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 has used its review of data to set clear goals to improve student achievement. The principal recognizes that these will require specific improvements to instructional practice. Teachers' professional development is well managed. It ensures each teacher is able to progress at an appropriate rate. New teachers have been helped to master basic classroom planning and management processes before starting to work on sophisticated assessment procedures. The effectiveness of this work is demonstrated by the quality and consistency with which teachers plan and target their instruction. Teachers use the comprehensive program of assessment effectively to monitor the impact of their instruction on student progress, and make revisions where appropriate.

Student data is not yet used explicitly to express the expected long-term outcomes in student achievement. Nevertheless, the principal has used 'the big picture' well to make strategic decisions. For example, she has unified instructional practices through revisions to the English language arts program. One offshoot of this is the significantly improved quality of reading assessment and the improved match of books to students' comprehension. The introduction of collaborative team teaching classes in kindergarten, combined with reduced class sizes has been a bold decision. A choice that is clearly justified by the improved quality of instruction. These examples symbolize the vision, energy and determination the principal demonstrates in her leadership, which has fully engaged the support of the school community.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: PS 234 The Independence 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 demanding, 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?				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?				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		