



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Earth School

Elementary School 364

**600 East 6 Street
New York
NY 10009**

Principal: Alison Hazut

Dates of review: May 7 - 8, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Earth School is an elementary school with 332 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 14% Black, 40% Hispanic, 33% White, and 12% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 93.8%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The new principal had been the assistant principal and was appointed in February 2008, when the former long-term principal retired. The school shares a building with two other schools and a District 75 special education program.

This school is engaged for the second year in a research project to design its own periodic assessment materials.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides thoughtful leadership in deepening the descriptive review process with information from customized periodic assessments.
- The peer mentorship program affords teachers rich opportunities to observe, support, and improve each other's teaching practice.
- The school shares core values about democracy in action, social responsibility, and diversity that drive curriculum and teaching decisions.
- The school is highly attentive to struggling learners, with interventions and services integrated into the child's classroom learning.
- Teachers consider a very good range of data in developing each child's working file, narrative reports, and snapshot of learning achievement.
- The school functions exceptionally well as a collaborative, respectful community.
- Teachers work hard to plan interesting and important learning activities for children, which produce broad student engagement.
- Strategic planning of funds, schedules, personnel, and resources reflects strongly the educational priorities and initiatives of the school.
- Parents appreciate open access and communication with teachers, which benefit each child's learning progress.
- Students recognize choice and hands-on experiences in their learning which foster independence and personal development.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen analysis of the learning progress of student sub-groups, including by gender and ethnicity, as compared with similar schools.
- Strengthen ways to increase the school attendance rate and address student lateness.
- Implement a writing rubric and interim writing assessments across all grades to support students' literacy achievement beyond reading levels.
- Seek additional partnerships to support the personal development of recent immigrants and children with social service needs.
- Develop further short-term improvement planning cycles for students and teachers with clear, measurable learning targets and flexible next steps.

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 Earth School is a very successful, collaborative learning community. Administration and teachers have created a “family” environment where students are well known to all staff. This ensures a school culture of high expectation and mutual respect between teachers and students. Teachers plan interesting learning activities that encourage broad student engagement. The new principal champions the relevance of qualitative and quantitative data to understand student progress fully. Teachers, students and parents trust her advocacy and, therefore, remain confident in the school’s future. Since last year’s Quality Review, the school has focused effectively on systematizing assessment and goal setting, and developing a peer mentorship and inter-visitation program. Robust professional development supports teachers well in making sense of student achievement data and planning for instructional next steps with rigorous goals. Aside from bi-yearly narratives, there are not yet consistent structures in place for formal review of student improvement plans. The school’s participation in Teachers College assessments in reading and “design your own” assessments in math, aligns with its constructivist approach. However, the school lacks interim assessments in writing to maximize students’ literacy progress. The peer mentorship initiative provides teachers useful feedback about their practice. The school has made less headway in other areas, such as improving the formal observation process for teachers, implementing school improvement planning cycles, and reinforcing student attendance and punctuality. In this small school, staff commit to know each child through rich learning experiences and thoughtful, descriptive review of student work. Instead of numerical grades, students receive detailed narrative reports and frequent individual conferencing about targeted goals and progress. The school analyzes data by demographic sub-groups and compares students’ prior performance. However, the disaggregated analysis and comparisons with similar schools at times lack depth. An exception is the inquiry team’s work, which focuses extensively on gender differences in math achievement. The school is highly attentive to struggling learners and provides strategic interventions.

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

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

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

The school has a long history of knowing well and valuing each child in qualitative ways. For fifteen years, teachers have trained in the descriptive review method of

understanding children's learning through deep analysis of their work. In partnership with a local university, teachers have engaged for two years in designing quantitative periodic assessments in math. For reading, the school uses Teachers College assessments. Combined, all of this qualitative and quantitative data provides a meaningful profile of children's strengths, interests, performance and progress.

The detailed knowledge the school has of each child allows teachers and staff to focus strategically on students' specific needs. The school very effectively maintains and passes along student data from one year to the next. These include students' working files, narrative reports and end-of-year "snapshots" of learning achievement. Teachers conscientiously keep binders of conference notes, running records and students' work. Robust professional development and training support the integration of varied student data. Close collaboration with intervention providers and coaches enables teachers to analyze and share information about student and class strengths and weaknesses, with very successful oversight of special education students and English language learners.

The school reviews student progress and achievement by different groups, including ethnic, gender and comparisons with peer schools, but with less rigorous monitoring than its keen analysis of past performance. The inquiry team's work with grade 3 girls in math offers some important findings about gender differences in achievement. However, except for this one gender study, the school does not compare deeply the interim progress made by student sub-groups.

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.

Staff, students and parents are actively involved in improvement planning, shared decision-making and collaboration. The annual town meeting, a milestone family event, sets and reviews school-wide goals and reaffirms the mission statement. As follow-up, staff attends retreats to reflect on student data, formulate explicit, rigorous goals, and plan next steps. As a result, goal setting guides effectively school strategic planning.

Teachers constantly communicate goals and progress to parents through frequent informal interactions and formal parent-teacher meetings, as well as in extensive narrative reports. Similarly, the school effectively articulates whole school goals and plans to achieve them via electronic list-serve that reaches 80% of parents, printed newsletters, Saturday sessions and the dynamic school leadership team and parent association. Parents and teachers speak with unanimity about the "open access" and "communication" they enjoy as members of the school community, which strengthens home-school contact and benefits each child's learning progress.

The school addresses well the needs of struggling learners by providing a comprehensive range of interventions and services. Special education teachers partner successfully with grade-level colleagues to monitor and support the learning progress of students in greatest need of improvement.

Staff members convey high expectations for behavior, academic integrity and community service. Visual evidence of shared values abounds in conflict resolution charts, town hall

celebrations and six-page narrative reports. Goals are embedded in the school culture, with students easily able to state personal goals, such as, “I need to know my multiplication tables up to 12 x 12.”

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 Teachers College balanced literacy approach and investigations math program comprise the school’s core curricula. Compassionate and enthusiastic teachers utilize assessment data to group students by need and re-teach content in different ways. Differentiated lessons include modifications to address different learning needs, especially in multi-aged classes. Interim assessments provide useful information about students’ proficiency in reading and math, but not writing or other subject areas. Therefore, the school lacks an objective profile of student learning or consistent plan for next steps in the key area of writing. Efforts are under way to develop writing rubrics and interim writing assessments to enhance students’ literacy achievement.

The Earth School community shares core values about democracy in action, social responsibility and diversity that drive curriculum and teaching decisions. Its unique environmental and social studies-based curriculum includes the study of earth science, health and cooking, visual arts, and community building across all grades. Student learning extends well beyond classroom walls, as children map their neighborhood, participate in outdoor camping experiences, and identify animal and plant life from a local park. Students recognize choice and hands-on experiences in their learning which foster independence and personal development. The school functions exceptionally well as a collaborative, respectful community, where individual and group learning are celebrated and purposeful.

Attendance procedures are solidly in place, but these actions have not resulted in overall improvements in student attendance and punctuality. The attendance team is considering other approaches, including incentives. Strategic planning of schedules, personnel and resources reflects well the school’s educational priorities and initiatives.

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 school is piloting successfully a peer mentorship and inter-visitation program that enables teachers to observe, support and improve each other’s teaching practice. Ten teachers, including all teachers new to the school, are paired based on self-identified professional goals. Already, the school recognizes improved teaching practice resulting from this initiative and hopes to expand the scope by involving more teachers. One new teacher reflected that his peer mentor “keeps teasing out deeper thinking from students through her questions,” a powerful strategy he hopes to apply to his own teaching.

The administration provides on-going support for all teachers to grow professionally and holds staff accountable for teaching and learning. A committee of teachers and administrators plans highly relevant professional development to improve instruction and assessment practices. The commitment to collaborative learning through professional development is significant, as teachers meet weekly after school for two hours and monthly for a half day. Although leaders visit classrooms regularly and have frequent constructive instructional conversations with teachers, the school lacks thoroughness and immediacy in its formalized, written feedback with teachers.

Parents appreciate the school's excellent reputation, intimate setting, and varied partnerships that enrich children's learning experiences. The school embraces relationships with specialized arts groups and community-based organizations, such as Arts Connection, Third Street Music, and the University Settlement and OASIS after school programs. Fewer links exist to agencies or organizations that support recent immigrants or children with social service needs.

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 principal provides thoughtful leadership in deepening the descriptive review process with information from customized periodic assessments. This year the school has created a documentation tool for teachers to record specific evidence of a child's progress towards an academic goal. With great regularity, teachers meet together to discuss assessment and observational information and think about logical next steps. The extended day program for struggling learners exemplifies this well. In eight-week cycles, students with similar academic needs receive targeted instruction with a specific goal. At the end of the cycle, teachers carefully review student work, administer customized assessments and revise each child's learning plan.

School improvement efforts already produce positive results, but are not comprehensive enough to ensure that changing student and teacher needs are always met. Data for higher achieving students indicates flat or declining progress for several years. Only recently, however, has parent demand for enrichment resulted in a coach pushing into upper grade classes for this purpose. In part, this delayed response reflects a disconnect between student goal setting, which is a highly effective and consistent school process, and revising student improvement plans, which is not yet tightly structured. The models of the twice-yearly narrative reports and eight-week cycles of extended day instruction are very strong examples on which to build of improvement planning with clear time frames.

The school community aligns powerfully in setting key priorities for future growth. One priority, for example, has been to empower highly trained teacher leaders with added responsibilities, as the budget no longer supports an assistant principal position. Already, the principal has taken strategic steps to implement this change.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Earth 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