



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Clarence Witherspoon School**

**Elementary School 045**

**126-28 150 Street  
Queens  
NY 11436**

**Principal: Evelyn Terrell**

**Dates of review: February 12 - 13, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Jo Storrs**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Clarence Witherspoon is an elementary school with 431 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 6. The school population comprises 81% Black, 12% Hispanic, 2% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 92.2%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 98% eligibility.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal's dedication and commitment to every student permeate the school.
- The attractive learning environment, celebrating students' work and successes, sets high expectations for students' achievement.
- Administration uses data regularly to meet the students' needs.
- Students with learning difficulties are very well supported and make good progress.
- The instructional team provides valuable support to improve instruction and student's performance.
- The school creates a wide range of opportunities for parents to understand and support their children's academic and personal development.
- Enthusiastic teachers and staff work collaboratively to raise student's performance.
- Students benefit from a core curriculum and interventions carefully aligned to their needs.
- The high levels of mutual trust and respect between students, teachers and staff impact positively on students' personal and academic development.
- Firmly implemented procedures ensure the school runs smoothly and that attendance is high.

### What the school needs to improve

- Deepen the use of data to identify needs more sharply, set precise goals and differentiate instruction for all groups of students, particularly high achievers.
- Enable teachers to work with support staff so instruction is consistent for general education students with intervention programs.
- Extend opportunities for all teachers to observe each other's instruction.
- Improve monitoring procedures to ensure they focus firmly on the progress and achievement of all groups of students.

## 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 proficient.**

Clarence Witherspoon is a caring, nurturing school which consistently strives towards its commendable goal of all students performing well. The principal is respected by the community for her commitment to the school and her concern for the academic and social development of the students. Her high expectations for students' achievement are visible in the attractive learning environment that celebrates students' work and successes, and is shared by everyone. Leaders use data regularly to identify, set goals and plan programs effectively for most students but not consistently for all groups of students, particularly higher achievers. The instructional team provides helpful support and students benefit from a core curriculum and interventions carefully aligned to their needs. Those with learning or language difficulties are very well supported and make good progress. The principal has recognized that time needs to be provided for teachers and support staff to work together to ensure that instruction and interventions for general education students is of a consistently high quality.

The school functions smoothly and provides a calm learning environment where parents are valued and attendance is high. The teachers and staff are enthusiastic and work harmoniously together but there are too few opportunities for teachers to observe each other's instruction and share effective practices. Their good relationships with students and the high levels of mutual trust and respect have a positive impact on students' personal and academic development. They check progress regularly through a wide range of suitable monitoring procedures. However, monitoring has not been rigorous enough to ensure that goals, programs and instruction meet the needs of all groups of students, especially higher achievers.

The school addressed most of the recommendations of the last review. Teachers are receiving training and support to use data more effectively to differentiate instruction but this is not yet consistently in place for all students. Links between school, grade, class and teacher goals are more explicit and measurable but precise goals for all groups of students are not fully in place. The school's inquiry team is being influential in using recent City data to identify and set goals for the focus group, in providing more targeted support for these students and in tracking their progress.

### 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.**

Administration collect a range of useful information from internal and external test results, portfolios of students' work and records of students' attitudes, behavior and homework response. This provides an overview of each student's attainment and progress and enables the school to compare its performance annually. As a result, the school knows that, while results improved in some areas, they declined in English language arts over the same period. Leaders attributed this drop to grade 4, which was the most significant problem, but did not interrogate the data further to discover the other significant issues that needed to be addressed. For instance, there was a significant fall in Level 4 results in all testing grades and some gender issues.

On entry, students' needs are evaluated informally using records and parental information. This is followed by more formal assessment in January when they join the classes with the resources most suited to their needs. Their progress is carefully tracked using data binders and suitable interventions are put into place as required. Those achieving higher levels in the lower grades join "accelerated" classes which are not yet available in the upper grades. A small proportion leave at the end of grade 2 to attend a nearby "gifted and talented" school to meet their learning needs. The performance of students with learning or language difficulties and those at risk is vigilantly checked and analyzed by teachers and intervention staff. This ensures that valuable specific support is provided, and results in these students making good progress. Whilst regular assessment throughout the school helps leaders and staff to check that programs are meeting the needs of lower achievers successfully, they do not always check to ensure that there is sufficient challenge and extension for higher achievers. The inquiry team, comprising the cabinet and staff, is playing a significant role in using data more effectively. Members identified the specific skills deficit for the focus group of the lowest achieving students in the upper grades, set challenging goals for the students and implemented specific interventions to address these shortcomings. Meeting twice a month to check progress, they have revised programs where necessary and, as a result, the achievement of these students is improving rapidly. The work of the inquiry team has helped the school to recognize that students benefit most when class teachers and staff have time to plan together to co-ordinate support. While the inquiry team and some teachers are confident with the use of the new data system, not all staff use it with the same confidence. .

**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 principal's vision, to reduce the proportion of students gaining only the lower levels, drives school goals, and progress towards these is regularly tracked. All students are expected to make at least one year's growth annually and those below grade level are expected to make more. Nevertheless, specific goals to address gender issues and to challenge higher attainers are not yet consistently set. The cabinet and instructional team provides valuable support which has helped teachers to set grade, class and student goals and plans aligned to the school goals. They use all available data to understand students' next steps, including useful formal and informal discussions about individual students and samples of their work. Goals and plans for students in the greatest need of improvement are rigorously identified and programs successfully meet their individual needs.

The principal's high expectations are supported by staff and parents. Such expectations are visible in the attractive learning environment that celebrates students' work and

achievements and enhances students' learning. Students enjoy earning tokens for example for good attendance or behavior, which they redeem for rewards such as a basketball. The school's welcoming, positive culture encourages parents to join in discussion about their children's education. Parents are valued and say that the school is concerned and supportive of them and their children. They enjoy the regular meetings, workshops and opportunities to share end-of-unit celebrations with their children. These important occasions strengthen links between school and home and promote the school's goals and expectations. Those parents who take advantage of these opportunities value their relationship with the school.

**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 proficient.**

The mandated curriculum is supplemented by supportive interventions and additional programs before and after the school day. Individualized, thoughtful programs are devised for students at risk. This is exemplified by a student receiving excellent, kindly support and guidance to improve learning following a family bereavement. Mastery of skills is a high priority for the school. This is interpreted effectively into short-term goals and plans, and progress towards mastery measured regularly. Across the school, they are reinforced, for example, thorough integrating the "skill of the week" carefully into instruction. Interdisciplinary projects from a "Core Knowledge" program in the lower grades are making instruction meaningful and are successfully broadening students' horizons and interest in learning. In addition, enrichment activities such as the performing arts clubs led by "City Lights Theatre Arts" group provide opportunities for students to develop self confidence, for example, by performing in shows such as "The Lion King" that are enjoyed by all. The good relationships, high levels of trust and respect between students and staff have a positive impact on students' personal and academic development.

The principal focuses resources on helping students to achieve. For instance, following poor results in grade 4 last year, class sizes have been reduced in grade 5, so the progress of individual students can be closely checked and programs quickly changed to better meet their needs. Scheduling decisions make best use of staffing, and play a significant role in differentiating instruction by providing excellent support for small groups of lower-achieving students and those with specific learning needs. However, instruction is not consistently differentiated across the school to address gender differences or the needs of higher achievers. Parents support the school in promoting good attendance and this, together with students' enjoyment of school, ensures that attendance is good.

**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's dedication to every student permeates the school. Positive, rigorously implemented procedures ensure students behave well and the school operates smoothly and efficiently in a calm atmosphere. The principal and assistant principals separately undertake formal observations followed up by helpful feedback and appropriate training

from coaches if necessary. This successful strategy keeps the principal constantly updated about the quality of instruction and students' progress. Through a combination of data outcomes and discussions with the cabinet she makes professional development decisions. Professional development is carefully aligned with whole school needs while responding to the needs of individual teachers. The principal's focus has been to enable teachers new to the profession or those in new situations, such as collaborative team teaching, to observe instruction in specific classes or other schools. However, there are some staff who do not have the opportunity to evaluate and sharpen their own instruction by observing and learning from others. All teachers work together openly and cooperatively at grade meetings to share lesson plans and ideas to interest and benefit the students. Teachers new to the profession speak highly of the quality of their mentors and the wider support from colleagues.

Substantial expert help from support staff, and coaches working closely with teachers, enhances students' academic and personal development. Leaders and staff know the students very well so social and emotional issues and concerns are quickly noticed and resolved before students' learning is impaired. The school has developed a range of beneficial links with outside academic and community agencies which effectively support students' overall development. For instance, in the lower grades, Barnes and Noble supports students' reading skills and parents are reading buddies for students at risk of falling behind.

**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 monitoring procedures to date have lacked rigor and, as a result, the school has not identified and addressed differences in achievement by gender and the needs of all higher achievers. However, the culture of setting goals, and assessing their impact, is becoming more consistent across the school. Monitoring is improving in frequency and regularity and is acted upon swiftly. For example, the leadership team monitors progress towards school goals quarterly and makes timely adjustments, if necessary, to programs and schedules. At classroom level, teachers include a wide range of assessment data in a comprehensive, bi-monthly student progress report which some use very well to set student goals and plan motivating lessons. However, this is not the case in all classrooms and, as a result, some instruction is not sufficiently well matched to the needs of all students.

The school collects data on students' attitudes, attendance, behavior, academic achievement and progress of most students. The administration collates this useful information to provide an overview of the school's performance and the impact of programs and interventions on student achievement. Leaders' classroom observations, meetings with different groups of staff, and their analysis of data keep them informed of developments and trends which they need to address. Their observations of students' behavior and attitudes are now providing an effective check that programs are meeting student need.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The Clarence Witherspoon School</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.

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		
<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.

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	
<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.

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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X		

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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		

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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>