



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Samantha Smith School

Early Childhood School 182

90-36 150 Street

Queens

NY 11435

Principal: Andrew Topol

Dates of review: June 2 - 4, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Cheryl Baker

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 Samantha Smith School is an early childhood school with 891 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 2. The school population comprises 15% Black, 49% Hispanic, 1% White, and 35% Asian students. The student body includes 40% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 91.5%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 94% eligibility.

The principal, appointed in December of 2007, is in his first year of leadership at the school. The school encompasses three distinct sites, none of which has an outside play area for children.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal sets clear expectations for instruction and with the administrative team and actively supports teachers in refining their skills.
- Several collaborative groups have been formed to develop plans to support the goals of the school and are, increasingly, using data to formulate next steps.
- Teachers are provided with a broad array of professional development that is tailored to their individual needs, especially that of the newest teachers.
- Excellent communication between the administration, teachers and families effectively support the efficient day-to-day operation of the school.
- Students and their families benefit from a network of guidance and social service providers who support academic as well as personal development very well.
- Increased relationships with outside entities are resulting in enriched experiences for students, increases in academic supports and added resources for parents.
- The school's keen focus on improving the performance of students at risk resulted in restructured interventions, which improved learning.
- Students are well cared for, get along well with one another and demonstrate respect for their teachers, principal and other adults in the building.

What the school needs to improve

- Build upon the work of teams and committees by formulating a strategic plan for the school's improvement that specifies measurable benchmarks and timelines.
- Develop and communicate rigorous high expectations for students' academic, social and emotional development across and among grades.
- Formalize goal setting among teachers to support targets set for student outcomes.
- Continue to support teachers in the analysis and use of data and streamline systems and structures to track progress of individuals and groups over time.
- Continue to develop teachers' skills understanding individual students' learning needs and tailoring instruction to meet them.

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.

The school is making good progress in utilizing data to make instructional decisions and is ably guided in this by the principal. In his short tenure, he has established good relationships with teachers, parents, the community and his students through effective communication and personal attention. Effective practices for analyzing data are being established and refined to provide greater and more rapid access for teachers. The work of the inquiry team is making good strides in that regard. Teachers receive frequent high-quality professional development that is supplemented by regular coaching from administrators. This is resulting in an increased emphasis on extending effective instructional techniques, such as regular differentiation, to meet individual needs. However, the routine use of data regarding students' incremental understanding is not yet established as an aspect of teachers' planning practices. This and other goals for improvement are supported through committees who are developing plans, as suggested in the previous Quality Review. However, there is not a strategic plan that draws together their work to set and communicate clear, measurable goals and high expectations and timelines for success in meeting them.

There have been improvements in parent relationships because of outreach and communication, responding to the previous Quality Review. The school provides very strong academic and social supports for its students and their families. Relationships with outside agencies are growing, extending benefits to families and the school.

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 principal has made good progress in guiding the school in refining its use of student achievement data. Assessments in writing and math give periodic indications of students' learning. A very strong emphasis on routinely gathering information about student progress through running records and conferencing notes has increased the focus among teachers on what each student knows and is able to do. As these are still not completely embedded practices across all classrooms, teachers continue to need support in developing these assessment techniques. Results of these and other assessments are collated periodically to give a clear picture of how individuals, classes and grades are improving. Structures for accomplishing this are evolving as the school works to streamline its data management practices. Other forms of data, such as that for

attendance or for promotion in doubt, shed light on progress and are used very effectively by the principal to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and programs.

Fine-grained disaggregation of grade level data by ethnicity, gender and at-risk status is used effectively to identify groups' relative progress and appropriate placement. Administrators and specialists ably analyze data relative to the progress of special education students and that of English language learners. An increase in this and the cross referencing of data has led to recent restructuring of some placements to better meet students' learning needs, with initially positive results. To date, the school has not focused on following the progress of students year-on-year. Administrators, through their respective collegial study groups, are able to compare best practices with other schools and have adopted some approaches that have led to improvements, such as in the allocation of time for professional development. However, these comparisons do not necessarily mirror the school's enrollment, as there are so few early childhood schools.

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 has formalized several committees to formulate goals and plan for improvements in literacy, math, curriculum, and attendance, for example. Each has worked collaboratively and used student achievement and other data to effectively guide decisions for next steps. Much of their work has increased and begun to take focus since the principal assumed leadership. While clearly pointed at the alignment of practices, especially for curriculum, the development of explicit and rigorous high expectations for student achievement, supported by objectively measurable goals and timeframes, is just emerging. Thus, there is not yet an efficient vehicle by which the school can share its goals with the school community at large to enlist rigorous support for improvement targets. Nonetheless, the principal has taken effective steps to communicate his values and goals for teaching and learning to his staff and these are reflected in the ongoing work of committees. Clear and informative communication with parents has increased recently and has resulted in greater attendance at social events, especially those celebrating the broad diversity of the school's population. The principal's aim is to engender trust and ownership among parents so that they can learn how to effectively assist their children's learning and he takes every opportunity to get to know the families of his students. Translations of school information and reports of student's progress into home languages are routine. This is increasing parents' understanding of their children's learning, and to some degree, the goals set for them, such as in reading.

The school is rightly focused on the progress of its large proportion of English language learners and has introduced a phonics program to support gains in literacy. The inquiry team is gathering data to evaluate impact on learning. For all at-risk populations, there is close scrutiny of progress and appropriate programmatic placement. A very extensive menu of interventions is available and is tailored effectively to meet each student's needs. And, when student's achievement warrants, they are moved to more challenging, less restrictive environments.

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 school’s core curricular approaches provide useful data about students’ understandings through practices such as running records and conference notes in literacy and end of unit tests in math. However, these are used to varying degrees of effectiveness from classroom to classroom and as such, instruction is not as widely differentiated as it might be. Whole class instruction predominates. The work of the recent curriculum planning team is aimed at bringing greater clarity to expectations for students’ skill development across subjects and increasing alignment and benchmarking grade to grade. It is intended that this will also result in increased preparedness for the demands for demonstrating understanding at grade 3. The principal has set clear expectations for teaching and learning and uses classroom data to conference with teachers about their students’ progress. Random class visits, conferences with students about their learning and lesson plan checks are all effective accountability practices. These are resulting in more focus on engagement and active learning by many teachers, although this is not the case overall.

Students benefit from enrichment through instruction in subjects like science, art, and music. Trips and guest speakers also broaden students’ exposure and scope. Class libraries have been increased and updated to support the development and enjoyment of reading, resulting from data revealing poor reading comprehension. This also led to revisions to the extended day program, which now focuses solely on reading, with resulting increases in student skills. Students like their school, their teachers and their new principal. Very warm relationships among children and adults create a climate conducive to learning. Increased oversight of, and rewards for, attendance have resulted in an increased average of 92%. Parent education, especially for those new to this country, is resulting in greater understanding of the necessity of regular attendance.

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 his assistants make frequent visits to classrooms to observe teaching, demonstrate instructional techniques and engage with students to understand their learning. This has resulted in a very clear picture of the needs and strengths of each teacher and there is a strong commitment to individualized approaches of support. The principal provides regular commentary about what he has seen happening in classes through his weekly letters to staff, thus enhancing the focus on effective pedagogy. Skilled consultants, who have been effective in coaching teachers in balanced literacy approaches, ably supplement the work of administrators. To good effect, their work has been expanded to address approaches that meet the needs of special education students and English language learners as data show these to be those at greatest risk. Many opportunities for workshop attendance afford teachers additional professional development resources. Teachers meet in partial grade teams and share effective practices informally as well. However, schedule demands and the fact that school sites are some distance apart prohibit regular collaboration among all teachers on a grade. Some teachers visit other classrooms, primarily those new to the school. For them, there

is robust support from trained mentors and administrators. Early morning academic assistance schedules were adjusted so that administrators could provide individualized support and demonstrate approaches for these teachers, which has resulted in rapid gains in their instructional skills.

The school is fortunate to have a large and committed group of guidance and social service professionals. Administrators, teachers and parents applaud the dedication of these individuals. Many extend their services well beyond the confines of the school and the school day to ensure that students are properly clothed and housed. They held a very effective community organization fair that served as a conduit of information for parents about local aid and resources. It also resulted in an increase in relationships among participating organizations and the school for the enhancement of academic and social supports. Other groups have provided consistent support for the performing arts and music and the school looks forward to an extensive grant-funded after school program for art, science and culinary explorations.

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.

Several committees and teams have developed, or are developing, plans for aspects of school improvement. These are bringing the school together around the goals of the principal's performance review and the clearly understood overarching emphasis on instructional improvements. However, not all plans are sufficient to guide and drive improvements as they lack specific interim benchmarks for gauging progress. As well, while administrators' plans for improving teachers' outcomes are specific to the individual, they have not been formalized between teachers and administrators to increase ownership and accountability for student progress.

Overall, there has been a marked increase in utilizing periodic and diagnostic measures of progress across the school, which is informing decision making and assisting in making adjustments. This is especially evident in the school's effective approaches to assisting students in greatest need of improvement, such as English language learners and other at-risk students. The data resulting from the interim measures of their progress is integral to program modification and has been used well to improve outcomes. Teachers are increasing their capacity to effectively utilize periodic assessments of students' understanding to adjust instruction. Some are more skilled than others. At the administrative level, the principal and his team are very attuned to the evidence of progress, both statistical and anecdotal, and make astute decisions to adjust practices to improve teaching and learning. The rescheduling and redesign of extended day interventions to increase the focus on reading and, at the same time, increase personalized support for new teachers has produced positive outcomes on two fronts. The school is coalescing around the vision and direction of their new principal to nurture the intellectual, social and emotional aspects of all his children.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Samantha Smith 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