



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**The Shirlee Solomon School**

**Elementary School 008**

**112 Lindenwood Road  
Staten Island  
NY 10308**

**Principal: Lisa Esposito**

**Dates of review: October 25 - 26, 2007**

**Lead Reviewer: Nick Butt**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Shirlee Solomon School is an elementary school with 441 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 1% Black, 14% Hispanic, 82% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 5.6% English language learners and 11.1% 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 96%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal and assistant principal are outstanding instructional leaders who hold the respect of teachers, students and parents alike.
- School leaders and teachers meet very frequently to set goals and develop plans for all students, and constantly review progress towards them.
- The school is very successful at monitoring those pupils at most risk of underachieving and puts effective interventions in place to support them.
- The school has excellent links with parents, communicating its expectations to them extremely well and providing them with detailed information.
- Teachers involve students fully in their own learning so that they have an excellent understanding of what they need to do to improve.
- There is an outstanding range of curriculum enrichment, boosted by the school's success in obtaining grant funding from outside organizations.
- The school fosters a climate of respect resulting in excellent relationships between students and staff.
- High quality professional development is underpinned by a thorough understanding of staff needs drawn from observations and data.
- The school runs extremely smoothly because of the exceptional systems and procedures operated by the administration.
- The school instructional team evaluates the outcomes of periodic assessments most effectively in order to modify strategic plans.

### What the school needs to improve

- Develop assessment systems to gain greater insight into the performance of students on the threshold of the next achievement level in state tests.
- Build teachers' capacity to analyze and use data to track students' progress and adjust instruction to accelerate their learning.
- Ensure instruction differentiates consistently to meet the needs of all students.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Progress made since the last review

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

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is well developed.**

The Shirlee Solomon School is a thriving community of learners that takes to heart its mission statement, "Children first, high expectations, no excuses." Under the energetic leadership of its principal, students make good progress in a caring family environment, where each one is valued and known as an individual. Parents are passionate about the school, and are kept extremely well informed and involved. The parent coordinator organizes a rich variety of workshops and events for them and goes to great lengths to ensure queries or concerns are dealt with swiftly.

The school collects a wealth of data on its students, although this is not always presented in a form that is easily accessible to teachers. The assistant principal said, "We are data miners: we dig and dig until we find the gem of what we're looking for!" Since the last review, new assessment tools have been added and there is increasing use of technology in analyzing data. This process is still developing as the school seeks to find systems that are best suited to its needs and helps it to understand the performance of certain groups of pupils, such as those close to achieving the next level in state tests.

Teachers have very high expectations of students and involve them remarkably well in gaining insight into their learning through sharing data with them, and encouraging them to work together to assess their performance. Conferencing is well established throughout the school, and students all know what they have to do to learn even better. One student remarked, "They want us to have a successful life." Effective curriculum maps ensure courses are aligned to state and city standards and teaching is lively and fun. At times, learning takes place in differentiated groups, where there is just the right amount of challenge for students to achieve well. This is not yet consistent in all classrooms, although the school has made progress since the last review in forming a shared understanding among teachers of what comprises effective learning. Curriculum enrichment is particularly strong, with a wealth of activities for students to enjoy inside and outside the school day, often grant-funded by external organizations and involving the local community.

The principal and assistant principal have an excellent understanding of the quality of instruction as a result of daily walkthroughs. Professional development needs are identified and met as a result of setting whole school goals, from observations and from surveys of the teachers themselves. The coaches are instrumental in ensuring that training is differentiated to individual teachers' needs and that the school's UFT Teachers' Centre is widely used. The school runs extremely efficiently because of the care and thought that goes into its systems, for example in the way common preps are arranged to enable grades to meet together. The school has tackled all the areas to develop from the last Quality Review successfully, including inviting teachers and parents to attend relevant pupil progress team meetings. The inquiry team has started a longitudinal investigation into the progress of grade 4 students at risk of underachieving.

## **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 gathers great quantities of data from city and state tests and from its own, in-house systems. Leaders and teachers have a very clear understanding of the progress of each student and meet together often to discuss trends and to compare performance across classrooms and grades. Individual portfolios of students' achievements help to build up a record of their progress over time. Especially careful records are kept on the achievement of special education students and English language learners to make sure that they are meeting their individual targets. This has resulted in these students making good gains in their scores in the past year. The school analyzes the performance of different groups of students, and has purchased more boy-friendly reading materials in response to its findings. There are other groups of interest that the school would like to research more, including students at level 2 capable of making level 3, and those at level 3 who could reach level 4. Comparisons are made with similar schools and staff visit to find out more about areas to develop. The school is constantly seeking to employ smarter systems and to provide the training necessary to ensure that all teachers are fully conversant with the new approaches, especially as it moves over to using electronic databases.

**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.**

Teachers meet together continuously both formally and informally to discuss their students' progress, including daily meetings of the school instruction team. They join with teachers of special education students and English language learners to build up a full picture of their classrooms and grades, and set challenging goals for improvement. Particular care is taken to plan personal programs for those students most in need of improvement, taking into account their particular learning styles. The goals are shared with students, so they know exactly what is expected of them and how they can attain them. As the principal said, "If they're not involved in the process, they're not going to have a clear understanding." There is a powerful collaboration between teachers and with students, the whole school joining together to move forward relentlessly to achieve even greater growth. Where students have identified needs, or are at risk of falling behind, particular care is taken to plan achievable goals for them, and their progress towards them is measured at frequent intervals. New tiers of support are offered if the rate of acceleration is not fast enough. In this way, students make good gains in their performance, and the school maintains its strong academic position.

There are outstanding links with parents as a result of the excellent work of the parent coordinator and the extremely active Parent Teacher Association. All parents receive pamphlets telling them about the curriculum for their grade and how they can assist their child. They are given opportunities to take state tests themselves to find out what they are like, and receive monthly workshops on a wide range of topics of educational interest.

They are given helplines to call and a list of websites that would benefit their children. They also regularly receive detailed information on how well their children are doing.

**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 school has a vibrant core curriculum that stays fresh as a result of teachers reflecting upon what works and what could be improved. Daily bouts of mental math are sharpening students’ skills, and the introduction of a new phonics system into the lower grades is having a positive impact on reading. Projects that cut across subjects enthrall students, as when a special education class took the theme “drumming” and applied it to their writing, the arts and social studies. Students find the instruction exciting and lively. One said, “There’s a lot of fun incorporated into it.” Kindergarten students enjoyed turning paper bags into monsters in response to a story they had heard. Teachers are held to account for the progress of their students and walkthroughs include checklists of the learning environment and strategies being used. This has helped to ensure a level of consistency, although presently, not all instruction is differentiated sufficiently to meet the precise learning needs of each student.

The enrichment provided is exceptionally good, both through after-school activities and during the school day. Students learn a full range of musical instruments including the clarinet and trombone as part of the school’s band. There is also a successful chorus. Students receive tuition in Italian, and as part of a project, are publishing hardcover books on famous Italian Staten Islanders. With Snug Harbor, students have photographed historic Staten Island and are compiling a walking tour guide. A significant grant has been awarded for gym equipment. The school runs an innovative personal exercise program during recess where students receive individual work plans based on their level of fitness. It has won the New York City Golden Apple Award for excellence in recycling, and the American Girl Library Club helps girls improve their understanding of social studies. These activities, together with a wealth of visits, visitors and special events, contribute greatly towards students’ enjoyment of school and to their personal and academic development. Consequently, attendance is high, as students want to be at school. The family atmosphere of the school, where “all the teachers respect all the kids”, means students blossom and grow in confidence as they become young citizens.

**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.**

School leaders visit every classroom on a daily basis to see what is going on, as well as conducting more formal observations. They build up a full picture of the strengths in teaching and areas for development. Together with the coaches and the school instructional team, they draw up plans for the professional development of staff, and ensure they receive high quality training either in-house or from outside providers, even out-of-state if necessary. Support is followed up to measure the impact on classroom instruction and outcomes for students. Teachers have up to five periods of common preparation time each week, and use these to meet together to share ideas and also to observe one another teach. A teacher said, “There are a lot of teachers who will go that

extra mile to help a colleague.” Teachers actively reflect on their practice and enter into dialogue with one another and with administrators to modify their plans and instruction in the light of data. They are assisted by having access to a valuable resource in the UFT Teachers’ Centre based in the school. As a result of these initiatives, the quality of teaching has improved since the last review and students are making good gains in their learning. The work of academic and personal support services is fully integrated into the life of the school, with members of the pupil progress team and the guidance counselor attending grade meetings and being representatives on the school instruction team. This ensures that everyone is aware of students’ goals and contributes to evaluating how well they are moving towards meeting them. Excellent systems help the school to run extremely efficiently. The principal’s professional handbook sets out all procedures clearly for staff and a parent guidebook goes home to inform families about how the school operates. The discipline code book explains the school’s behavior policy, which is consistently implemented. Much thought goes into scheduling and record-keeping. There are outstanding links with numerous organizations to support the work of the school, many of which provide additional funding to enhance the curriculum.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

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

The school uses scale scores and proficiency ratings to arrive at an objective assessment of students’ achievement and sets ambitious plans for their progress. Teachers measure progress towards these goals at frequent intervals in collaboration with one another and make timely adjustments when warranted. A good range of diagnostic tools is employed for this purpose, although the school is aware of the need to refine these to make them even more precise in the quality of data they yield. Administrators and coaches devise effective plans for the improvement of instruction that are tailored to meet the needs of individual teachers, and check regularly on progress towards their goals. The Comprehensive Education Plan is drawn up in consultation with all staff, and sets interim timescales for review, when adjustments are made. This enables leaders to respond flexibly to new information, or to change tack where progress is slower than expected. The principal’s passionate vision for the future direction of the school is shared wholeheartedly by the staff and the wider community. The school is an anchor to the locality it serves, and commands a high degree of love and loyalty from those who work there and whose lives it touches. There is a clear drive for excellence, combined with sheer enjoyment and exuberance along the journey. It is very much a school, as its promotional pencils declare, “Reaching for the stars.”

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: THE SHIRLEE SOLOMON SCHOOL PS008</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 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	
<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?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				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 make 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	