



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

James M. Kieran

**Middle School 123
1025 Morrison Avenue
Bronx
NY 10472**

Principal: Virginia Connelly

Dates of review: October 16-17, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Denis Pittman

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

James M. Kiernan is a middle school with 567 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 34% Black, 65% Hispanic and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 52% and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 -2007 was 90%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 91% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has a clear, well-communicated vision for the school and works tirelessly in the interests of students and the community.
- The relationships between students, staff and parents are very positive and supportive.
- Parents are kept very well informed about their children's progress and appreciate the beneficial partnership that they share with the school.
- Through its small learning communities the school offers a wide range of curriculum activities which support student academic, creative and social well-being.
- The productive arrangements with outside agencies and organizations effectively support curriculum initiatives and promote student development.
- Data collection is very effective and rigorous, enabling good tracking of individual students' achievement and progress.
- The principal's regular observations of classroom practice enable her to identify staff skills and expertise and thus systematically improve instruction.
- Budgeting and staffing decisions have been very effectively and efficiently aligned with the school's improvement needs.
- New teachers are well supported so that they understand the school's procedures and expectations.

What the school needs to improve

- Implement strategies to develop further all teachers' skills, knowledge and understanding of the collection and utilization of data.
- Ensure that whole school goals contain measurable interim criteria for success so that monitoring is more effective.
- Ensure that all teachers provide instruction and instructional materials that carefully match the different capabilities and needs of all the students in each class.
- Extend the opportunities for mutual lesson observations to all teachers and across subject disciplines.
- Develop communication links with parents to enable feedback from them about their children's interests and ways of learning.

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 principal leads this friendly, effective and well-organized school from the front, and her leadership has provided the key catalyst for improvement and change in recent years. The school has made a determined response to the challenge of improving its overall performance and is effective in most key areas of development planning, apart from the setting and monitoring of interim objectives. The administration and faculty have a very good understanding of where it is, and how it is going to make improvements. The partnership with parents is strong and productive. The organization of the curriculum provides many opportunities to students to pursue their individual interests and in consequence is very motivating and stimulating for them. Teachers are very supportive, willingly giving of their time to help students improve. Curriculum mapping is very effective, but there are a few adjustments still to be made in matching lesson activities to the needs of all students. The school has a significant capacity to improve further and is very well placed to do so. Since the last review the school has improved the opportunities for common planning time and the collation of more efficient benchmarking data. The inquiry team is in place and has already identified a sample group of students for monitoring improvements in achievement.

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 administration and members of the inquiry team have set in place very effective systems to gather information about how well students are performing and drive this process rigorously. The data collection includes comparisons of the progress made by different classes within the grades, and between different grades. The school has used gender comparisons to identify the lower standards of writing amongst boys. Not all faculty members are equally conversant with how to use the information to plan and improve their instruction. The administration has recognized this and plans for all staff to receive training particularly in relation to the new assessment systems that are being set in place.

Class teachers keep a close check on the progress made by the individual students in their class. Staff have a very good understanding of the needs and capabilities of special education students and English language learners whose performance improves accordingly. The principal actively leads the rapid and efficient exchange of information

between the family and a range of external and internal specialist staff. The specialists' expert guidance is of particular benefit in helping the students make significant progress.

The administration checks on the progress and performance of ethnic groups where there are sufficient students to make the information statistically valid. Even though some groups are currently small, the school maintains a flexible approach to data collection which would allow for any future increases. The principal also keeps a close eye on the performance of similar schools, making comparisons with a wide range of schools in order to identify how to drive up achievement even further.

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.

The school makes very effective use of the information it has collected in order to set next steps for individual students, classes, grades and groups of students. Overarching goals, such as the focus on improving writing in all content areas, are also set at the whole school level as a result of a very extensive collaborative process. However not all of these goals are in terms of interim measurable outcomes for students. The school has used its comprehensive data files to identify a specific group whose performance is in need of improvement. An inquiry team is undertaking systematic investigation of the writing achievements of male English language learners in order to focus intervention strategies and improve performance.

Staff are skillful at promoting the performance of those students who are experiencing the greatest difficulty in making progress. Specialist staff, such as a social worker and psychologist, work closely with teachers to identify accurately the nature of the problems that the students are having. They do this with sensitivity and compassion, which is reflected in the detailed discussions they have about students.

Parents are very pleased with the way in which the school treats them as partners in learning with the staff. The parent coordinator is looking to improve and cement this partnership through a range of workshop activities. Initial events have included activities such as parental surveys and introductory evenings for the parents of new students. These initiatives have been well received. Parents appreciate the fact that staff take their views and knowledge into account when planning their children's programs and that they are kept well informed about the next steps that are set. Parents feel that staff provide their children with a good level of challenge that promotes academic prowess and mature standards of behavior. Currently there are limited responses by parents to feedback information about interests and learning styles of their children

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 provides a stimulating curriculum that students really enjoy. It is organized around two learning communities based on themes of science and technology and American studies. This organizational pattern provides innovative opportunities for

students to follow individual projects. Teachers provide interesting lessons that inspire students to work hard and want to learn. Some teachers are not as skillful as others in planning instruction that matches up with the different needs of the students in the class. For example, the standard textbooks being used may not always match the literacy levels of those students who find reading more difficult.

The administration continually searches for ways of stretching the school's resources and budget in order to extend the curriculum further. The curriculum is particularly impressive in mathematics. The department recently completely redesigned the curriculum map and the order for teaching units of study to students. The outcomes have led to significant improvements in student achievement. The school provides students with numerous opportunities to achieve success outside the school through its partnership arrangements for example in the 'Hope program' for higher achieving students. The administration is conscientious in adjusting the curriculum in response to perceived underachievement in any area. The emphasis which has been given to the development of student writing skills in all aspects of the school work and the use of common rubrics is a reflection of this commitment.

Students like the range of subjects that are taught. They feel that the arrangement of the small learning communities enables them to pursue issues that interest them. The introduction of the 'Zone Lounge' as a motivational reward has become a strong incentive for students to do well. Parents say that the curriculum is very wide and the range of after-school activities provided good learning experiences for their children.

There is a high level of mutual trust and respect around the school. Staff single out the principal for the way she empowers and supports staff. Students get on very well with each other. Parents talk about the high expectations for students to behave well in the classroom and around the school. They say bullying is not tolerated, that there are very few incidents of poor behavior and "it is a safe school"... One parent said, "Because of the drive and energy of the principal and staff they had changed their first inclinations and were very happy that they had decided to send their children here". Students are also aware of the high expectations that are placed upon them. One student said about the principal, "She means business. She's strict and focused on what she does."

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 administration provides a wide range of professional support to staff in order to make them even better at their jobs. Staff working within grades have regular opportunities to share good practice, for example by seeing each other teach. All teachers value the opportunity to review each other's work.

The school provides effective support to those who are new to the profession or new to this school. This includes arrangements for "buddy teachers" and mentors. In addition, teachers go out of their way to provide mutual support for each other. One said that the support they had received was "fantastic". Teachers consult each other if they are having difficulty in an area of instruction, and say they will always receive supportive comments from their colleagues on how to improve their practice. The principal makes full use of individual strengths and expertise identified through her regular observations of staff,

leading to improvements in instruction. She skillfully organizes working arrangements so that staff complement each other and develop new skills and improved ways of working.

The school has strong partnerships with businesses such as the Washington Mutual Savings Bank. There are productive academic partnerships such as those with local high schools and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. Community organizations provide tutorial and recreational services which enhance considerably the students' academic and personal growth.

The principal runs an efficiently-organized school which has a welcome, calm and productive feel to it. The students, staff and parents are very proud of their school; it is tidy, well decorated and well cared for.

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.

Staff work hard, through regular individual conferences alongside students, to make sure that each student knows exactly how well they have done and what they need to do next in order to improve. Well-established structures enable the administration to measure the progress of the different groups, classes and grades. However, interim objectives for whole school goals are not so clearly defined and as such are not easily measurable. As a consequence, it is more difficult than it should be to evaluate the monitoring of ongoing initiatives.

The administration and faculty have put in a lot of hard work over the year to make sure that there is a careful evaluation of each individual student's progress with a resetting of milestones for achievement. The implementation of the mastery grading plan has been very successful in complementing this work and raising student achievement. The school has gone a long way to providing goals for the various important groups such as the improvement in reading and writing for low-achieving boys. They are looking forward to receiving even more precise information through the planned changes in assessment procedures so that teachers have every available tool at their disposal when planning instruction. This will enable them to predict final and interim outcomes for students, and to monitor how well they have achieved those outcomes. The school has already made some preliminary excursions into the database and is preparing itself well through the setting up of the inquiry team.

The principal has set out a clear, comprehensive program for improvement and development. Through her dynamic example and open discussion, she has made sure that everyone, including staff, parents and students, is fully aware of her vision. She has created a very effective context for this vision to be realized.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: James M Kieran (MS 123)	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score				X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.					
To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?				X	
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?				X	
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X	

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.					
To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?				X	
2.2 focus on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area?				X	
2.3 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?				X	
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?				X	
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?				X	
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other's classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another's instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?			X		
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X	

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

To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school's plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.2 the school's plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?				X	
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to 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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X	