

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Maurice A. Fitzgerald School

Elementary School 199

**39-20 48 Avenue
Queens
NY 11104**

Acting Principal: Irene Gerhards

Dates of review: May 4 – 5, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Catherine M. Powis

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Maurice A. Fitzgerald is an elementary school with 1015 students from kindergarten through grade 4. The school population comprises 1% Black, 62% Hispanic, 7% White, and 29% Asian students. The student body includes 47% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 94.9%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 72% eligibility.

The school houses students in three separate sites and with temporary classrooms. It serves a very diverse population with 32 languages spoken in the home.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Maurice A. Fitzgerald Elementary School is a wonderfully nurturing and vibrant environment where students are happy and interested learners. The principal and assistant principals are inspirational leaders with a highly focused vision for continuous student improvement. Shared high expectations and professional rigor drive student achievement. A highly collaborative and reflective culture is self sustained by the staff that works together to plan the curriculum, reflect on best practices, and ensure that instruction provides engagement and interest for student learning. The school's professional development plan offers extensive support to experienced as well as new teachers. Ways to create organizational structures for collaboration and professional dialogue are a constant challenge that continues to be explored. School leaders are working on more individualized professional development plans for all teachers, highlighting specific goals for improving their work with benchmark monitoring for progress across the year. In response to last's year Quality Review and parent feedback the school offers an arts program to all students, coupled with initiatives to develop the students' academic, cultural and social awareness. Extended-day and Saturday tutorial instruction provides an array of support in intervention and enrichment which enhances many students' achievement and progress.

Administration and faculty develop effective whole-school plans and goals in order to improve the learning and achievement of a very diverse student population. These improvement goals do not extend to every core subject to the degree that they do in English language arts and math. Most teachers use data successfully to create informative goals to help students understand their next learning steps. The system for setting learning goals and for benchmarking progress toward them is not yet sufficiently formalized to enable all students and parents to be fully engaged in the process.

The school has several beneficial links with parents who appreciate the caring attitude the staff have for their children, and the good information about their children's work and progress. Parent responses to the Learning Environment Survey indicate above average levels of trust and respect. Parents have very high praise for the dedication of the staff, the quality of education and the care their children receive in school. As one parent shared, "We always feel welcomed here by everyone when we come to the school."

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school leaders' vision for school improvement is embraced by staff who demonstrates a willingness to share best practices within a culture that is reflective and collaborative.
- The staff is fully engaged in the in-depth curriculum support and professional development provided by a college-based partnership and this contributes to consistent and engaging instruction.
- The school is effective in meeting the specific needs of a large subgroup of English language learners by providing rigorous instructional practices through bilingual transitional classes and push-in specialist support.
- The inquiry team work has been successful in encouraging teachers to reflect on assessment outcomes and to make decisions on design and effectiveness of teaching strategies.
- Parents appreciate the variety of ways in which the school communicates with them about the high expectations for their children's progress, learning goals, and opportunities to be involved in their learning.
- The school's inviting, attractive environment reflects both a climate of respect and the celebration of student work, clearly illustrating standards of progress and achievement.

What the school needs to improve

- Further develop the work in science and social studies, so that rigorous assessment processes, including detailed rubrics matched to units of study and that match those in English language arts and math, are put into place.
- Expand the school's use of data to pinpoint progress and set measurable interim learning goals for individual students, subgroups, classes and grades in all core subjects.
- Further develop organizational structures to more effectively provide teachers with opportunities to review curriculum, reflect on best practices, and evaluate the progress of their students around common grade and school-wide goals.
- Build on the school's plan for differentiating professional development so that it is highly individualized and goal oriented to meet very specific needs of experienced teachers as well as new staff.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school collects and analyzes a wide range of data to provide teachers with useful reports on the progress of individuals, groups of students, and grades. School leaders and faculty consistently rely on a formative and summative data in English language arts and math, and use it very effectively to inform instructional and organizational decisions. As a result, at risk students attend early morning and after-school programs for additional support. High achievers are earmarked for the enrichment class on each grade. The rigorous use of data is not as evident in other subjects. Teachers and school leaders identify students as not meeting or at risk of not meeting New York State science standards and/or social studies standards to participate in an extended-day program. However, in classrooms, cluster teachers of these core subjects only rely on unit checklists to assess learning outcomes.

The school is very effective in using data to identify and support the needs of its large population of English language learners, and also special education students. Through a thorough analysis of various data sources the third grade inquiry team identified a target group of English language learners in need of support in reading. As a result, the school is piloting a co-teaching model where the science cluster teacher and English language learner specialist provide targeted instruction in content and academic vocabulary. A cross-graded class of students with special educational needs is taught by a highly qualified teacher who has looped with the class for three years. Based on an ongoing analysis of learning outcomes, these students join mainstream classes with instructional support when they are successful.

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.

High expectations for students' personal and academic success are demonstrated by the excellent student behavior, engagement in classrooms, and celebrations of student work that adorn the bulletin boards throughout the school. The school provides students and their families with feedback about students' progress regularly throughout the year. Monthly grade-level letters give parents information on the broad curriculum goals for the next month in each core subject. Some grade letters also provide parents with information about ways in which they can help their children achieve these goals. Parents are very appreciative of the multiple opportunities they have to communicate with teachers and school leaders about the needs of their children. As a result, the school does well on the Learning Environment Survey.

The Comprehensive Education Plan, which is developed collaboratively, clearly delineates school-wide goals and includes a thorough needs assessment using a wide range of data. Through a long-standing partnership with Teachers' College, the school is highly effective in setting ongoing reading and writing goals for individuals, classes, and grades. Teachers monitor progress towards these goals and revise them during frequent conferences with students, and reviews of their work while cultivating self and peer assessment. This helps clarify expectations and the necessary steps for achievement for both parents and students. The process also takes place in math, but only to some extent in social studies and science. Teachers set short-term goals for individuals and groups of students in many classes and subjects. However, the school is not consistent in sharing interim goals and ways to achieve them with students and their families in all subjects and grades. As a result, although students know their long-term goals, they are not always able to articulate the next steps necessary to achieve them. Where some teachers do demonstrate this good practice, such as in a fourth grade class of English language learners and grade two collaborative team-teaching class, students know exactly what they have to do to improve and because of this are learning to assess their own progress.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Strong staff relationships and collaborative opportunities for teachers to discuss student progress and improve instruction are the hallmarks of improvement planning in this school. This spirit of collaboration, an essential ingredient of the school's culture, is also evident in the team work among students in the classroom during activities such as investigating a science problem or providing feedback to a buddy during writing workshop. Teachers implement the workshop model of teaching across all grades consistently in all core subjects. The clear routines, procedures, including specific teaching points for each lesson, help to ensure that students are actively engaged and that teachers use instructional time productively. Furthermore, opportunities for differentiated instruction are made possible when students work in purposefully established small groups. Teachers meet throughout the week to align instruction to desired learning results and expected performances. Their effective use of assessments leads to purposeful grouping of students and an appropriate degree of challenge that is matched to performance indicators and skill levels in English language arts and math. In self-contained, special education classes learning styles are taken into account when planning instruction so that learning activities are differentiated carefully enabling these students to make good progress. During grade conferences one assistant principal is working with teachers of social studies and science to further develop learning goal checklists matched to skills, content, and processes. However, school leaders recognize the need to develop assessment rubrics to match each unit of study in order to determine how well short-term learning goals are met in these core subjects, and to monitor progress more closely.

The principal is committed to keeping classes small by making strategic budgetary choices. Generous staffing supports lower class sizes, and the expansion of the arts program this year ensures that every student participates in some form of arts education. As the school acquires more technology equipment and upgrades such as smart boards,

school leaders provide on-going professional development to ensure that they enhance instruction and student engagement.

Families know the school's reputation for having high academic standards. In addition to students being engaged in their learning and wanting to succeed, a Reaching Out curriculum teaches students basic values, such as honesty and respect for one another. The curriculum is supported further by the Book of the Month school-wide literacy initiative. Parents appreciate that the monthly newsletter from the parent coordinator highlights this curriculum. In response to last's year Quality Review and parent feedback the school offers an arts program to all students. Extended-day and Saturday tutorial instruction provides an array of support in intervention and enrichment which enhances many students' achievement and progress.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

School leaders monitor the effectiveness of instruction regularly by frequent walkthroughs, formal and informal observations, and conversations with teachers. Well-written observation reports provide constructive feedback to teachers that are aligned with school-wide goals. Written feedback on how to further differentiate activities during a math lesson, or to enhance one-to-one conferencing with students during reading workshop has been successful in improving instruction for experienced teachers as well as new teachers.

Teachers are highly collaborative and benefit from valuable opportunities to participate in professional development both inside and outside the school. Cycles of professional development are planned for upper grades throughout the year. Teachers are able to make decisions based on interest and need, and their feedback has been very positive in explaining how they have learned to help their students learn better. As a result, the administration plans to expand these cycles to the lower grades next year. This is enhanced by the expertise of the school's coaches who provide individualized help for identified training needs, or by request. Demonstration lessons and side-by-side coaching are regularly planned for new teachers, who also receive valuable support from mentors assigned to them.

The school has been supported by Teachers' College for nine years. Teacher reflection surveys, student performance, and coach observations have identified that teachers need to continue to be challenged to improve their craft. As a result, the Teachers' College professional development model was adjusted this year. Third and fourth grade teachers participate in focused study groups together to blend the curriculum and bring coherence from year to year. This has become an integral part of moving the school's continuous improvement plan forward. Nevertheless, individualizing professional development planning for all teachers highlighting specific goals for improving their work, with benchmark monitoring for progress across the year is not yet consistent and embedded in the school's culture. Also further opportunities to create organizational structures for collaboration and professional dialogue are a constant challenge for the administration to continue to explore in response to last year's Quality Review.

The work of a third grade and fourth grade inquiry team of teachers, coaches and administrators have had a very positive impact on teachers' confidence in using and understanding data to focus on why some students are struggling. This has resulted in

the two teams developing a deeper understanding of what strategies are needed to accelerate the learning outcomes of these strugglers. The teams are very thoughtful in assessing the strategies and practices they are using in the classroom, such as developing a 'retelling' toolkit for good readers, to determine which strategies may benefit the whole school curriculum.

Sunnyside Community Services partners with the school to offer an after-school program that supports the academic and social growth of 250 students. Also it offers parent education classes which include computer courses, English as a Second Language classes, and parenting courses which develop parents' own skills and so aid them in supporting their children's learning at home.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 school's Comprehensive Education Plan provides an accurate picture of how a review of the Progress Report, the Quality Review, and Learning Environmental Survey led to an assessment of the school's practices and reflection on next steps. As a result, the plan has specific and measurable goals for improving student achievement in English language arts, math, science, and technology. Such detailed goals for raising student achievement are not yet established in other core areas. Consequently, timeframes and benchmarks are not in place and used to evaluate progress toward long-term goals in all subjects. Furthermore, in English language arts, math, and science students are challenged to make good progress in state exams, but there is a lack of clarity in the process for social studies.

The school relies greatly on Fountas and Pinnell reading assessments and ECLAS Variation for regular and effective checks throughout the year to monitor the achievement levels and progress of individuals, groups and subgroups of students. This leads to flexible programs of support for groups and individual students using a range of appropriate intervention services offered in the morning, afternoon, and on Saturday. However, leaders have not yet established a broader process for rigorous and formal monitoring of student progress that includes interim checkpoints and benchmark measures in every core subject in and across grades. School leaders evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum and instruction and make organizational modifications on the basis of their findings. For example, a major investment in FOSS kits in science matched with professional development was made to enhance non-fiction content and subject-specific vocabulary, especially for English language learners following an evaluation of the outcomes of the school's recent Progress Report and other available data.

The principal and assistant principals are inspirational leaders with a highly focused vision for the future development of the school and how to improve performance of students. The vision is shared and embraced by all staff and students in a climate that is exceptionally calm, inviting, and engaging.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Maurice A. Fitzgerald Elementary School	Δ	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			X	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?		X		
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X	
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.

<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X	
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X	
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X	
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X	

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

<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X	
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X	
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X	

Quality Review Scoring Key

△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed
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