

Quality Review

Report

2008-2009

Meyer Levin School

Middle School 285

5309 Beverley Road
Brooklyn
NY 11203

Principal: Frederick Underwood

Dates of review: February 4 - 5, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Beverly A. Wilkins

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Meyer Levin is a middle school with 1032 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 95% Black, 3.8% Hispanic, 0.6% White, and 0.3% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 3% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 93.1%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding. The appointment of a new school leader occurred mid-September 2008.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Meyer Levin is a middle school with an impressive arts program that consists of a steel band, instrumental band, chorus, dance, drama, visual arts and costume design classes. The school hosts both an Astral and Javits program for gifted and talented students. The Astral program provides an enriched curriculum, which expands learning experience in the form of challenging activities designed for critical and creative thought. Challenging and rigorous curriculums also support students in the Javits program. The Javits program services those students who are gifted and talented in academic and non-academic areas. The school offers the earth science regents, integrated math, foreign language, and advanced performing arts classes. Therefore, many of its graduates meet the criteria for admission into specialized high schools. The school also serves general education and special education students. The school has a growing population of English language learners. Therefore, the research-based English as a second language program focuses on developing English literacy skills through implementation of the balanced literacy approach. Modified pullout instruction addresses the language proficiency levels and needs of English language learners.

The school has a dynamic principal who has embraced the traditions of the school and, in a short time, has nurtured the existing culture of mutual trust and respect among students and adults. As part of setting the course for increased student achievement, the principal's vision for all school-wide planning emanates from data about what students do well and what the school needs to do better. Based on summative data, the school has expanded activities to include special education students. Activities include mainstreaming students, pullout intervention programs for additional English language arts and math support, and the Read 180 program.

Due to insufficient systems for goal setting with interim checkpoints, at present, all students do not yet take full ownership and responsibility for their performance. Half of students interviewed shared that they were not involved in goal setting. Students in accelerated programs shared that while they engage in conversations with their teachers about next learning steps, these conversations do not translate into written plans. In addition, the school does not make effective and consistent use of disaggregated data to create introspective actionable plans across all core subject and non-core subject areas. The school's climate and tone reflect a "family environment" and high expectations for learning.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students are generally enthusiastic about learning and lessons taught meet City and State performance standards.
- The school leader has a clear vision for the school which includes working collaboratively with the community and its partner organizations to meet the diverse needs of students.
- The school's positive tone and climate promotes mutual trust and respect between adults and students.
- Teachers participate in training sessions in the use and interpretation of data, and have begun to explore instructional strategies consistent with varied learning styles.
- Through its rich performing arts program, the school welcomes and appreciates the diverse talents and interests among students.
- Effective communication systems with families provide opportunity for increased parent involvement in school life.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish ongoing systems for reflective analysis of formal and informal data for special education students, English language learners, and by gender and ethnicity.
- Create differentiated plans with timeframes for meeting successive learning targets that address goal setting for all groups of students.
- Sharpen the process for consistent professional collaborations that link what teachers do well with best practice across grade levels.
- Develop systems to monitor, track, and modify learning objectives that result in actionable plans with interim checkpoints of progress toward school-wide goals.

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 a significant array of data. This enables school leaders and staff to use summative and formative data sets to "look at the school globally". Data analysis includes a detailed item analysis in English language arts and math. Such work ensures an accurate view of student performance outcomes for comparison to similar schools and city-wide populations. The use of uniform assessments, Advantage 1200, and teacher assessments provide relevant information on student progress in social studies and science. Currently, the school does not compile student profiles based on the integration of data. Because of this, there is limited reflective understanding of the achievement and lack of achievement within subgroups. The school leader is proud of the level of student performance on past foreign language Regent exams. However, data collection and monitoring in Spanish or physical education classes are not yet developed.

Authentic assessment and customized rubrics to monitor the progress of students in the performing arts programs lead to individualized plans and close monitoring over time. The school leaders analyze data by grade level, for example, and the principal is acutely aware of learning patterns and trends that adversely affect achievement in English language arts and math. Consequently, the school is using diagnostic and predictive assessments to determine how best to address the varying needs of students and teachers in core subject areas.

The rate of satisfaction by parents who responded to the Learning Environment Survey is high. Parents value the open exchange of information and view the school as a "family friendly environment". Parents receive mid-semester progress reports that inform them of how their children are doing in school. The school has a website and two external bulletin boards that provide up-to-date information about school life. Because of a capital improvement grant, the school has launched a new voicemail system. This system keeps parents informed and involved in their children's education. Parents, administrators, and teachers engage in conversations about student progress and performance as needed. Parents expressed having adequate access to teachers and administrators and feel abreast of learning objectives in all content areas. One parent stated, "Everyone has a job to do, but we all work together- in unity- to find out what is going on with our children's learning." Parents feel teachers "really apply themselves" and "encourage learning".

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.

School administration and coaches work cohesively to promote departmental goal setting in core subject areas. The school sets goals and monitors interim benchmarks for students in accelerated and performing arts programs. The school acknowledges that this practice of uniformly addressing learning steps for individual students and subgroup populations is inconsistent. As a result, the importance of goal setting with incremental next steps for achieving measurable teaching and learning objectives has not taken root school-wide. During the large group meeting with students, eight out of sixteen students interviewed reported they were not involved in academic goal setting. The student rate of response on the Learning Environment Survey indicates 26% of students are not involved in goal setting. However, all students said teachers inform them of expectations for learning and encourage them to work hard. While interventions and student support services are in place, plans and timeframes for achieving individual learning goals fail to engage all teachers and students in proactive differentiated planning and goal setting.

The Comprehensive Educational Plan outlines uniform core instructional goals. These goals are clear with relevant learning objectives. Representative groups of stakeholders participate in the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan. Parents are equal members of the school leadership team. The principal has made good use of the school's budget and having identified the need to sustain academic and social programs for over-aged students is forging collaborative partnerships with colleagues and community agencies. The principal admits that a greater concentration on broadening the school's performing arts program to include the general education population is now required.

The school has high expectations for attendance and behavior. Systems for monitoring and tracking student attendance and lateness are sharp and consistent. Monthly improvement targets are set. The attendance team identifies patterns that exist per subject class, student, and/or teacher. The school evaluates progress toward attendance improvement goals that result in comparisons with last year's Year to Date rate and relevant support adjustments.

Students and parents spoke enthusiastically about mid-semester progress reports. One student shared with the reviewer that the reports aid in understanding "...what we are doing that we need to do better."

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.

The principal is working with administration and coaches to increase teacher proficiency in "drilling down far enough into data" to make strategic choices about how to differentiate instructional approaches to match specific student needs in all classes. A six-day school schedule provides students in accelerated programs with double periods in talent classes. In

other classes, students have double periods of content area instruction in literacy and math. Currently, the school is evaluating the schedule to determine the impact on student outcomes. School leaders conduct department meetings monthly. This practice leads to an analysis of assessments to strengthen differentiated lessons and drive interdisciplinary instruction. For example, thematic units in biology provide students with opportunities to incorporate content knowledge in dance class. Project-based learning and exit projects add breadth to core curriculums. In the classrooms visited, students engaged in well-planned lessons and enthusiastically worked on rigorous tasks. Nevertheless, in a high proportion of these classes the work was the same for all students. In addition, the use of technology to extend learning and enrich lessons has not been widely adopted by faculty.

The primary goal of the school is to advance the progress of "whisper students", students at Level 3 demonstrating limited progress or regression. Following a review of predictive and instructionally targeted assessments, strategies to advance their progress become the focus of conversations between administrators and coaches. Plans to improve student outcomes are not incisive enough and interim goals are not objectively measurable. The school's work with English language learners engage students in informal goal setting through conversations with their English as a second language teacher. The teacher stated, he "keeps tabs" on progress in proficiency and uses this information for next step teaching. In initial conversations with English language learner students, the teacher lets them know where they are on the language acquisition continuum and set individual goals.

Deans, the student support team, the parent coordinator, and school safety agents work collaboratively to maintain a healthy and wholesome learning environment. The new principal fosters a culture of respect and has an open door policy. The teacher responses on the Learning Environment Survey indicate that over 80% of teachers "trust the principal at his word" and that the "school leader communicates a clear vision for this school". Eighty-nine percent of parents surveyed are satisfied with the school's communication and opportunities to be involved in their child's learning. As a result, there is effective communication of mission and vision that includes all stakeholders. During the review, the reviewer observed positive rapport and cordial acknowledgements between students and the principal.

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.

The principal and assistant principals utilize formal and informal teacher observations to provide feedback and to align professional support. The principal reviews teacher data reports to identify trends for consideration during one-to-one conversations with faculty and supervising administrators. Some senior teachers are engaged in using the California professional teaching standards to self-select professional activities for deepening their repertoire in an area directly related to student learning. This is in response to a recommendation made during last year's Quality Review. The school's mentoring program affords opportunities for the sharing of lessons and pedagogical thinking between senior and new staff. Teachers reported frequent observations by the new principal leading to recommendations for further professional growth and improved skill-based teaching. School leaders conduct model lessons, and arrange intra-visitations based on identified needs of teachers. Teachers also participate in professional development offered by the Integrated Curriculum and Instruction Support Organization.

The work of the inquiry team has bolstered the school's ability to place filtered data in the hands of teachers. The team is in the process of moving from managing data to growing the inquiry process school-wide. While the team's work has not yet had a direct impact on practice collectively, the current work has expanded to include classroom teachers. The team is devising plans for sharing its findings on students stuck at Level 3 for discussion and feedback from the school community.

The principal ensures that every teacher completes a need assessment. However, this work has not led to a deliberate plan for individual professional goal setting. The school has a cadre of teachers who participate in a Think Tank group, but there is no system in place for evaluating the effectiveness of their learning or the impact on student outcomes. In 75% of classroom observed, lessons reflected teacher-directed, whole-group approaches. Presently, capacity building is not sufficiently addressing alignment of innovative practice across the school with teacher need. Therefore, revision and evaluation of classroom practice, by the majority of teachers, is limited.

Youth development is well established. The gym is undergoing reconstruction. However, there is a dance studio. The school engages in partnerships conducive to accelerated academic and personal growth. The Young People Dance Series, Medgar Evers College-My Brother's Keeper Program, and Sports and Arts After-School Program are longstanding supporters of the Meyer Levin school community. Through a distinctive component of the school's commitment to enriching the lives and learning of its students, students travel abroad. Parents, teachers, and administrators support and chaperone this event.

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 principal articulates clear-sighted direction for continuous improvement in student outcomes and teacher instructional practice. He recognizes the school's accomplishments and is cognizant of inherent challenges that impede student performance and progress. Plans to reorganize the school for greater cohesion and continuity across grade levels and departments clearly support a vision for future development of structured professional collaborations. The current organization of the school limits collective monitoring, tracking, and modifying learning objectives that result in integrated actionable plans with interim checkpoints. While teachers of grade 8, the focus grade for the year, have common preparation time, teachers of grade 6 and grade 7 do not have common preparation periods. The influence of horizontal and vertical collaborations among teachers will lead to a broadening of fluent planning and common practice across each grade and departments. One teacher said, "Data provided by administration is a constant reminder to speak to each other and to our students."

Variable responses in relation to differentiation of teaching practices indicate that school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints to inform conversations with teachers, but practice is not yet common in benchmarking the progress of all subgroups and individual students in all core subjects.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Meyer Levin School	△	➤	✓	+
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>	△	➤	✓	+
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>	△	➤	✓	+
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed