



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

**Quality Review Report
Office of Accountability
2008-2009**

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

AmPark Neighborhood School

Elementary School 344

3990 Hillman Avenue

Bronx

NY 10463

Principal: Betty Lopez-Towey

Dates of review: February 9 -10, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Sonia Menendez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The AmPark Neighborhood School is an elementary school with 91 students from kindergarten through grade 3. The school population comprises 18% Black, 44% Hispanic, 24% White, and 13% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners, but there are no special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 94%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 31% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The AmPark Neighborhood School is a small school that opened its doors two years ago. The school has created an environment of “wellness” where children feel safe, nurtured and valued, and enjoy coming to school. The principal introduced the labyrinth, an ancient walking meditation tool to further promote the concept of “self care.” Teachers participate in a yearly retreat away from the school where they have an opportunity to share their “stories”, resulting in a strong collegial atmosphere amongst the staff and administration.

The principal and staff work hard in building a positive learning environment for students where they can experiment, reflect and become active participants in their own learning. As a result, parents value the instructional expectations the school has for their children and are extremely supportive of the school. “It feels like a community and each child is valued,” said one parent. Parents were instrumental in the school’s development and have a stake in its success.

The school places a strong emphasis on the development of the whole child and students are encouraged to share and participate as active learners. Therefore, classrooms are bright, stimulating with good resources. Leaders and teachers foster learning through projects supported by collaboration with the Salvadori Architecture Program. The curriculum is broad and stimulating, developed by teachers from their own interests and that of their students. However, it lacks the progression of skills and strategies from one grade to the next. It also hampers teachers from identifying the progress of students in relation to curriculum requirements and levels in each subject. In addition, teachers are not yet confident in differentiating instruction to meet the specific needs of all students.

The school has created its Design Your Own assessments, which it uses effectively to monitor the performance of all students. Data collection and analysis is consistent in literacy, math and the arts across all grades. It is not sufficiently developed across all core subjects to enable teachers to monitor progress and inform instruction robustly. Currently, the school has not established measurable learning outcomes to help teachers set precise learning objectives and assess student progress accurately in all subjects.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The dedicated and caring principal inspires the school community to share her vision and, through her leadership, ensures there is a nurturing and caring atmosphere throughout.
- The school empowers its teachers to employ a broad and engaging curriculum that is based on teachers' and students' interests.
- The staff is dedicated, hard working and is making good use of Design Your Own and other assessments to monitor and paint an accurate picture of student progress.
- The school has a strong community atmosphere where families are fully involved in their children's learning.
- Teachers are empowering students and fostering their creativity as they provide students with opportunities to make choices and develop goals.
- Students feel safe and supported, enjoy their learning and, as a result, parents value the positive learning environment the school has developed for their children.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to empower teachers to use assessment data and its analysis across all subjects to further accelerate student learning.
- Formalize individual teacher development plans and provide written feedback from classroom observations that is clear, informative, builds on their expertise and identifies areas for growth.
- Refine goal setting across the school to formalize measurable, actionable interim checkpoints to monitor progress towards achieving the goals.
- Extend the skills of the faculty in differentiating instruction to meet the identified needs of individual and groups of students, including questioning that extends student thinking.

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 formative and summative data to understand the performance and progress of each student in literacy, math and the arts. Classroom teachers use good systems for monitoring student performance, including DRA 2, conference notes, TERC assessments and Design Your Own assessments in literacy and math. In this way, they have a clear picture of how each student is progressing and areas of need. All classroom teachers regularly update an assessment folder for each student, which contains useful information on individual learning needs. They use these suitably to plan lessons to support student outcomes.

The school places strong emphasis on meeting the needs of individual students and aligns its Design Your Own assessments to include social and emotional development, as well as literacy and math. The principal and staff are making good use of these assessments to track and meet the needs of individuals and groups of students.

The principal and teachers warmly welcome parents into the school. Teachers encourage parents to visit regularly to discuss their child's performance. This "open door" policy, which includes a Monday morning sing-along and Friday morning teatime, means that parents receive feedback and share information and strategies about their child frequently. To support this parental collaboration, the school sends home a progress report three times a year, which includes information about all aspects of each student's development. The school understands that parental input goes beyond fundraising. It welcomes and solicits parental involvement in collecting information about students via a family conference goals sheet.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal and staff are fully committed to both the personal and academic development of the students. They assess student progress using a range of valuable assessment data. Teachers analyze this data to identify goals for students with parents' and students' involvement. Students, parents and teachers set goals together. However, although leaders and teachers set goals across grades and classes for individual students, they do not formalize quantifiable school-wide goals with specific timeframes. As a result, the school lacks the precise strategic measure of how well it is doing. Constituents understand their long-term goals. They also recognize the benefits

of formalizing interim checkpoints to monitor progress precisely, but have not yet instigated these.

Collaboration and teamwork are strong features of the school and allow staff to share effectively. Teachers meet regularly with the principal and coach to discuss student performance and progress using conference notes and analysis of data as the backdrop for their discussion. Teachers maintain authentic student work in portfolios, which they use to develop next learning steps for individuals and groups of students. The school developed its own progress report that monitors student progress in English language arts, math, and social and emotional development. In addition to the mandated conferences, teachers meet with parents to discuss student progress using the family conference sheet to record next steps.

Parents value the high expectations that the school has for their children. They are actively involved in the school by attending and providing workshops, such as the one focusing on homework. As they agreed, "It helped us look at homework differently." Parents work in partnership with teachers in the education of their children. One parent rightly summarized this, saying, "School is a community where parents can contribute and are heard." Teachers also share information about learning with parents through frequent newsletters. In addition, parents are active decision makers in the school leadership team therefore are key stakeholders in completing the Comprehensive Educational Plan.

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 school provides a broad, interdisciplinary and engaging curriculum based on the interests of both teachers and students. As one student said, "I'm never bored. It's always fun because the teachers make it interesting." This reflects the fact that the students feel that they are learning more than just the subject matter.

Students enjoy "choice time," where they make independent decisions about activities in which they want to participate. Teachers construct these learning opportunities to be hands-on, creative and imaginative. This allows students to experience success in different ways since they can draw, paint, write, read and conduct surveys. Attendance is good and continues to improve because of the engaging curriculum, especially students' "choice time" and creative arts projects.

The school clearly believes that learning should be child-centered and that students are active participants in their own learning. However, teachers and leaders have not aligned the curriculum so that lessons in one area or grade draw from knowledge, skills or strategies learned in another. Teachers are not sufficiently precise in setting learning objectives for lessons to assist them in identifying students' mastery of skills and concepts. Although lessons are varied and engaging, teachers do not consistently address the needs of all students through differentiated activities and clear learning objectives.

The school uses budget, staffing and scheduling creatively to support the curriculum and instruction. Arts teachers collaborate with classroom teachers so that the arts are an integral component of the learning opportunities offered to students. The arts teachers monitor student progress and communicate this to parents.

In this small school, the principal and staff know students and families well since they have created a strong “family” atmosphere. All constituents evidence mutual trust and respect. As one parent stated, “Even when there is conflict, our opinions are valued.” Teachers send home newsletters, which support keeping parents informed about what students are learning and the skills they are expected to master. Parents appreciate staff’s hard work, accessibility and that they make learning fun. Parents actively participate in enrichment activities that enhance the curriculum, such as ice skating trips.

The caring climate supports students’ academic and personal development well. High levels of mutual trust and excellent relationships are found throughout the school. The school’s well understood and accepted values mean that staff and students interact with each other well. Teachers support student learning effectively and maintain a low stress yet interesting learning atmosphere in their classrooms. The calm and caring attitude of the adults supports both the emotional and academic progress of students. .

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 school is committed to becoming a professional learning community. As a result, staff meet bi-weekly, after school as well during common preps and engage in inter-visitations to further develop their expertise. Through these formal and informal conversations, teachers work closely as a team to share their plans and inform their practice. The strong collegial and collaborative atmosphere ensures that new teachers adapt quickly to the school’s routines and procedures. The inquiry work is clearly only beginning to take root and set the stage for looking at sub-groups of students and how they are being supported to make progress. As a result of the team’s work, teachers are now analyzing students’ specific comprehension skills and strategies.

Teachers are reflective of their practice, and work closely with the coaches to refine their lesson design and delivery, which results in engaging activities. However, not all lessons sufficiently challenge students at their level and extend their thinking. The administration has not formalized individual teacher development plans based on observations and discussions. Teachers do not receive adequate formal written feedback on how they can continue to improve their instructional practice with precise goals or next steps for growth.

The school focuses strongly on educating the “whole child”, and therefore, reviews social and emotional as well as academic data. To support the notion of wellness, the school has collaborated with a non-profit organization, Wellness in the Schools, to promote the use of non-toxic cleaners in schools, in addition to making healthy food choices in an effort to address the health needs of their students. Teachers and leaders make good use of the part-time support team to assist students and families. In addition, the parents interviewed stated that the school values every child and the “open door” policy allows the principal to confer with parents on any issue that arises.

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 community shares a clear vision for furthering the development of an educational environment where children love learning and each child is valued. Parents, teachers and administration see themselves as key stakeholders in the education of the "whole" child. As a result, each constituency takes an active role in the education of the students. It is clear that students are the focal point of the school and that administration, teachers and parents work as partners to provide good educational opportunities for students. However, specific, measurable goals with interim learning targets for each student are not yet part of this process. This limits the school's ability to monitor progress rigorously.

Teachers use a range of formative and summative assessments, as well as data portfolios in literacy, mathematics and the arts to monitor student performance and progress. Teachers analyze the data gathered to make curricular decisions and design lessons aimed at improving student outcomes. Teachers share the information gathered with parents through progress reports that are distributed to parents periodically. As a result, teachers, parents and children develop broad goals together. However, the school has not formally developed measurable, actionable goals with interim checkpoints outside of the Comprehensive Educational Plan, principal's performance review, or in English language arts, math and the arts. As a result, leaders do not have the precise evidence to secure a strategic overview and inform robust planning.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: AmPark Neighborhood 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 collects 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, DYQ, 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