



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Public School 121

**126-10 109th Avenue
Queens
NY 11420**

Principal: Henry Somers

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Reviewer: Rodney Braithwaite

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 121 is a neighborhood school serving 998 students, from kindergarten through grade 6, and is often oversubscribed. There are 29 special education students. Fifty three percent of students are described as Asian and others in the school's annual report, but the school indicates that almost all of them are actually from the Caribbean. Twenty eight percent of students are Black, 18% are Hispanic, with 1% White. Four percent of students are English language learners. Ten percent of the most recent immigrants come from Guyana and 4% from Trinidad and Tobago. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding. The school's student attendance rate, at around 92%, is similar to that of City schools, but a little below that of similar schools.

Part 2: Overview Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Public School 121 is an outstanding school, led by an inspirational principal who has created a high quality environment for the education of students.
- The school has a strong, democratic and multi-skilled administration, driven by high expectations for the learning and care of students.
- The school has consistently improved results in all subjects and in all grades in City and State tests for the last five years.
- The whole school staff is an exceptional team, working towards a common goal of giving the best possible start to the education and well being of their students.
- Students love school, are bright and lively, show a compelling desire to learn, and behave excellently.
- School leaders and faculty have a very good understanding of data from State and City tests and from their own detailed assessments, and use this information very effectively in planning.
- The school has a well structured Comprehensive Education Plan, which is used flexibly, and clearly outlines planning and goals for achievement.
- The principal is highly resourceful, perceptive and skilled in his control of the budget which is consistently aligned to the identified resource needs in the school.
- Instruction is of a consistently high standard throughout the school, offering challenge and expectation and very good relationships with students.
- Professional development is embedded in the culture of the school, and all teachers share a common goal of constant improvement in their practice.

What the school needs to improve

- Initiate the creation of a full time summer program, in order to maintain and improve the education of the students most in need.
- Investigate and implement new strategies, so that more parents become active partners with the school in the education of their children.
- Develop new and more effective methods to improve the attendance of students.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The principal has been in place for seven years and has set high expectations from the start that Public School 121 will strive to be the 'best of the best'. The success of his leadership is demonstrated by a consistent and proud school which is determined that it will always strive for improvement. Students are at the very center of the vision of the principal and his staff. They respond by enjoying their learning, respecting their teachers and each other, and at all times trying to do better.

The school cabinet shares the vision of the principal, and is very skilled in planning the curriculum, evaluating progress towards achieving school goals, and managing change successfully when it is needed. Teachers are very successful in their collection and use of data and assessment information, which enables them to identify the progress and needs of all their students. As a result, effective intervention programs for students most in need are introduced very quickly. Most of all, every member of staff knows that they are fully accountable for the progress and well being of their students, and that only the very highest quality of performance will be accepted. They are offered many opportunities in their professional development, which they welcome in order to improve their instructional skills.

The school knows where it can improve and is already planning how to do this, because it is a school which never stands still. If it can find ways to enhance the lives of its students, then, whatever the financial implications, it will do so. Spurred on by the principal, it has the collective will to improve attendance, encourage more parental support and create a full time summer school. The consistency of the strong team climate in the school, places it in a strong position to continue its ambitious development and improvement.

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 student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school utilizes a considerable range of assessment and tests in order to build a detailed picture of the progress, achievement and well being of every student. It has devised its own diagnostic school made exams, in order to provide data which can be used to evaluate students' needs, and also to compare progress made in individual classes within grades. Although the administration is mainly instrumental in deciding what data to create and gather, all staff demonstrate good skills in producing and understanding data about their students, and in understanding the data generated by City and State tests. Very detailed student portfolios relating to their progress, are produced by all teachers.

The school is very successful in producing data about the progress of different groups of learners. Much information is collected, for example, on the progress of special education students, and newly arrived immigrants with English language difficulties, in order to

devise relevant intervention strategies. A strong feature is the speed at which the school is able to produce information about groups of students or individuals, in order that action can be taken quickly. The school also constantly refers to past data in order to compare its performance over time. The ongoing examination of its results in State and City tests has driven its constant goal of improvement. Consequently, results in English language arts and mathematics have improved in all grades and for all groups of students for several years. This has been recognized by the school receiving a 2004 Pathfinder Award, and awards for High Performing/Gap Closing School/District in both 2005, and 2006.

Performance is continually compared with that of similar schools, and the administration is immediately able to produce up to date data showing this. The school never ceases to strive to achieve better performance than both similar and more advantaged schools; in it's determination to be 'the best of the best'.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school has many collaborative groups meeting regularly, who plan individual, grade and whole school goals for improvement. The school's detailed and effective Comprehensive Education Plan sets the pace in designing goals for the whole school. The school cabinet, subject coaches and separate grade groups of teachers and facilitators, meet very regularly in order to review all available data about groups and individual students. A particular focus area recently has been the increasing number of students from Guyana entering the school. These students often have little previous experience of education, and have difficulties with English language, but the school acts rapidly to provide for their needs. For several years, the school has paid particular attention to the need to reduce the number of students in every grade only reaching level 1 in English language arts and mathematics, which has led to consistent and continuing improvement.

Education throughout the school is driven by high expectation and challenge. Students have no doubt as to what is expected of them, and in discussion often talk about 'learning', being the most important part of school for them. This information is also provided in many ways to parents and caregivers. However, although some parents support the school well in their high expectations for the learning of their children, a significant number do not share information with the school, making the school's goals for improvement more difficult to achieve. The school itself, driven constantly by the very high expectations of the principal, is relentless in its determination to understand the learning needs of all its students.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

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

All of the schools’ instruction is aligned with the mandated curriculum. The curriculum is driven by the data produced from the results of testing, and from the high volume of data produced by individual teachers. This information is then related to the high expectations of the school in order to seek improvement for all. As a result, for example, streamed classes have been introduced in grades 1 to 6 for reading and writing. This has led to a marked improvement in the reading of many students, especially those with the greatest learning difficulties. The school takes great pride in its provision of very diverse instructional programs, such as performing arts, and its development of challenging programs for the talented and gifted students, identified by teacher assessments.

All teachers have a clear understanding that they are held accountable for student outcomes. The school administration is rigorous in its daily focus on the use of data by teachers to improve student performance. The school’s focused plan ensures that no time is wasted in identifying and providing for the needs of individual students. Special education students, for example, are provided with very effective learning programs, based on frequent diagnostic testing. The school is particularly good at identifying the needs of lower achieving students, resulting in far fewer students being referred for special education than in similar and City schools.

Very good relationships between staff and pupils are visible through the whole school. Students enjoy their learning, join in activities with enthusiasm, and appreciate how well their teachers care for them. Respect of, and trust in the staff is universal. Although student attendance is average compared to City schools, it is below that of similar schools. The administration accepts that this is disappointing in such a vibrant school, and could be improved.

Budgeting decisions are strongly related to data, as for instance the indications that levels in technology were too low because of outdated resources. The school now abounds with laptops and a new well equipped computer area, resulting in rapid gains in student achievement. Although the school receives a significantly lower budget than other City and similar schools, the principal is resourceful and successful in providing for most of the schools’ resource needs.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

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

The school has a very stringent and demanding process for the selection of staff. Teachers are only chosen who demonstrate the ability to deliver instruction based upon the rigorous use of data and high expectations for student achievement. They are also made aware that their work will be evaluated on a daily basis by the principal and assistant principals. Teachers accept these demands willingly, and both experienced and newly qualified staff share the school’s vision of continuous improvement in a safe and lively learning environment. One of the reasons for their very positive attitudes is the provision

by the administration of high quality professional development, based upon the needs of the school. The school has established within the building a teachers' center, and has three full time staff developers. Assistant principals are actively engaged with teachers in evaluating planning and whether goals are being achieved or need adjustment. Much peer collaboration within grades also takes place regularly, both formally and informally.

Underpinning teachers' development is the realization that the principal has a detailed knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses. This is because he has daily walkthroughs, sometimes twice, throughout the whole school and has excellent judgment in evaluating instruction. He is also very skilful in identifying the professional development needs of all members of staff, and in providing them with the necessary training to improve. The principal is able to introduce change when necessary because he is held in such high esteem by the whole school community. He sets high standards of commitment and expectation by example. The assistant principals and coaches are also very adept at evaluating the performance of not only the teachers but also themselves. Teachers enjoy observing each others' instruction and are demonstrably mutually supportive.

The school ensures that its own identified needs through assessment are assisted by consistently effective use of outside support services, especially for special education students. It also makes a considerable effort to enrich students' learning through the provision of a wide range of activities such as visual arts and visits from well known authors to encourage a love of reading and story telling.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

Planning throughout the school, based upon the Comprehensive Education Plan, is well structured to ensure that constant evaluation and self review is taking place. All staff understand the need to consistently analyze the success or otherwise of their goal setting and predictions of student progress and needs. This year the school plan has identified five key goals, which are being regularly revised, dependent upon the improvement being shown. These are to increase academic scores, to keep a low special education referral rate, to provide a safe working environment for all, to improve parent relationships and to reduce suspension rates. Suspension rates are currently running at zero. All of these goals impinge upon the success of student learning, and the school is, at a moment, able to use its data and information with great flexibility, so that goals can be very quickly modified where necessary. The school has numerous intervention strategies, such as using F-status teachers and extra reading specialists for instructing small groups of students in most need of help in reading and math. Comparison of student progress in classes and in grades is used regularly so that weaknesses in improvement or instruction can be swiftly remedied.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Public School 121	∅	✓	+
Quality Score			X

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 student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 			X
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 			X
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school* 			X
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.			X
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and 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 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.			X
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.			X
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.			X
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X