



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**Early Childhood School 361
3109 Newkirk Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11226**

Principal: Jo'Anne Challenger

**Dates of review: October 3 – 4, 2007
Lead Reviewer: Helenmary Stark**

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Early Childhood School 361 is an early childhood school with 651 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 2. The school population comprises 87.9% Black, 7.4% Hispanic, 2.9% White, 0.42% American Indian and 1.26% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 - 2007 is 91.2%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 90% eligibility.

Students in grades 1 and 2 are in the main building, and the kindergarten and pre-kindergarten classes are in a mini building on the same site.

In the past there has been a high staff turnover and recent efforts to encourage staff to remain have resulted in 94% retention this year.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and staff are enthusiastic and committed, dedicated to providing high quality instruction.
- The school effectively uses a range of objective data to monitor student progress and performance.
- Staff use data well to inform their planning and instructional programs.
- The school is now using assessment data from the Reading First initiative to set goals and plan detailed instruction for students needing intensive support.
- The principal and coaches use observations and student data to plan effective individual professional development strategies for teachers.
- Staff development is carefully structured to improve the quality of instruction for areas of focus within the school.
- The school makes good use of data to evaluate its practice and willingly changes systems to improve provision for students.
- High expectations of achievement and behavior are shared with the whole school community.
- The school provides a broad and enriching curriculum with a clear focus on the arts.
- The principal monitors attendance rigorously and has introduced a variety of imaginative strategies to improve students' attendance.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the setting of objective, measurable, individual goals to include all students.
- Develop interim targets for all goals with structured timeframes for review and adjustment.
- Clarify the school goals which are shared with the whole school community.
- Develop teachers' understanding of differentiation to enable them to use it consistently to ensure all students are challenged in lessons.

Part 3: Main findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Public School 361 is an elementary school with practices grounded in early-childhood philosophy. It aims to nurture students to enable them to achieve well. It provides an enriched learning environment and a breadth of experiences to support students. Ongoing outreach to parents is evident and the parent teacher association is actively involved in finding new ways to strengthen the connection between school and home.

The collaborative culture involves all staff in evaluating practices and outcomes for impact and in moving the school forward. A teacher said, “We have come a long way,” reflecting the staff feeling about the progress of the school. The school uses a variety of data to monitor progress and identify areas for future development. Professional development on new initiatives reinforces the collaborative culture, providing valued guidance on the use of new programs and resources.

Since the last Quality Review, the school has used data to compare the relative progress of groups of students and has provided ongoing development opportunities for teachers of English language learners. The new Reading First initiative has provided diagnostic assessments to measure progress. The next step is to use this wealth of information to differentiate instruction for students and make clear to them the next steps in their learning. Professional development for differentiation is already one of the main areas of focus for the school this year.

The new inquiry team has decided to focus on a specific group of students who need to make more progress in literacy. The team has already discovered that different assessments are providing conflicting information about the progress of these students. They are now exploring this data further.

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the student’s progress over time.

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

Public School 361 generates a wealth of data to measure each student’s performance and progress. Examples include DIBELS, TerraNova and Everyday Math assessments. The principal, assistant principal, and the coaches regularly meet to analyze data. As a result of the careful selection of assessments, the cabinet has a thorough knowledge of the progress and achievement of all students. The principal compares data across classrooms and discusses outcomes of assessments with teachers. The DIBELS results

are displayed on the bulletin boards outside the main office so all staff are fully aware of the performance of their students in relation to others within the school. The literacy and math coaches discuss relevant classroom information with each teacher and support the development of effective programs to address the areas of weakness identified in the assessments.

Using objective data, the principal has been able to analyze the data in relation to gender and ethnicity. Currently there are no significant differences or trends. The principal tracks the progress of English language learners at the school. She has compared their progress with English language learners at another local school, and concluded that the curriculum for these students needs further modification to enable them to make better progress. Since the last review, teachers of English language learners have been involved in professional development but the impact has been difficult to measure due to staff turnover. With the increasing availability of objective data, the principal will now be in a position to make more objective comparisons from year to year. As the students at Public School 361 transfer to Public School 269, the principals of each school regularly meet to compare the progress and performance of the students in grades 2 and 3.

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

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

At Public School 361 there is a clearly shared expectation that all students will do their best and perform at or above grade level. The principal communicates this to parents through meetings and in writing. The school provides a program of workshops to enable parents to support their children with homework. “The principal and teachers involve me,” was a strongly held parent view. Yet, communication of whole school goals and individual student goals to all parents is not consistent. The whole school community shares a common vision of high expectations around achievement and behavior.

There is a strong collaborative climate throughout the school. Teachers and coaches work well together to plan instruction. The teachers use objective assessments to plan the next learning steps for their classes, focusing clearly on skills that need to be learned. These short-term goals are having a positive impact on the quality of instruction. The school continues to refine rubrics, particularly focused upon increasing the rigor of assessment for writing. Although teachers use data in their planning, they do not yet consistently set measurable targets for individual students. Following the most recent DIBELS assessment, the literacy coaches have identified the students who need intensive support for their reading. They have now identified each small step that these students will need to take in order to make the required progress by the end of the year. This has been formulated into a detailed plan with interim goals which is now being shared with teachers to support the planning of appropriate instruction.

The academic intervention teachers work closely with the classroom teachers to provide targeted instruction for those students identified. Teachers monitor progress regularly and share assessment data to align instruction to these individual students’ needs. Special education students are mainstreamed in general education classes for subjects in which they achieve well. As a result, these students progress well. The school support services, including the psychologist, speech therapists and guidance counselors, provide timely intervention and support.

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

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

Public School 361 has a clear focus on student achievement. Strategies are planned based on evaluation of both academic assessments and observations of student behavior. The school’s decision to use Reading First from last year has had a positive impact on teachers’ confidence in the teaching of reading. The literacy coaches report that the teachers find the approach “structured, focused and systematic.” Teachers are now familiar with the new assessments that indicate the progress students have made and gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The coaches meet with teachers monthly to support the analysis of data to refine instruction and meet emerging needs.

The principal makes strategic budgetary and scheduling decisions to support school goals. For example, following a visit to a school in Maryland to see Reading First in action, she decided to ensure that there are always two teachers in each classroom for the small-group work part of each literacy block. This collaborative approach provides intensive support and challenge for all students.

The school has a rich arts program which includes opportunities for learning musical instruments and participating in dance and art activities. Extensive links with outside providers, including the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, add professional stimulus and expertise. A new initiative, which is exciting the students, is the introduction of enrichment activities for grade 2 students. This includes designing a comic book, cooking and knitting.

The school culture is one of shared responsibility. As a result, teachers are keenly accountable both for the students in their class and others throughout the school. Parents and students hold their teachers in high regard. Although teachers use assessment data to plan instructional programs, they do not yet consistently differentiate their instruction for either individuals or groups of students. As a result, the instruction does not always sufficiently challenge higher-achieving students. Teachers of special education classes match their instruction more closely to the needs of individual students.

The principal monitors attendance rigorously. She shares this data with individual teachers, investigating comparisons between classes, to hold them personally accountable. Teachers understand that engaging students is fundamental to their good attendance. Additionally there are incentives both for students and parents for good and improved attendance. This has led to increased rates of attendance over the last four years. The latest figures confirm a continuing upward trend.

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

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

Professional development is a driving force of this school. The cabinet at Public School 361 has developed a variety of effective strategies for evaluating teachers’ instruction. These include information from daily walkthroughs, lesson observations, student assessment data and staff questionnaires. The cabinet uses this information to fine-tune the focus of staff development both to meet individual and whole-school needs. Teachers

are aware of the expectations for high-quality teaching. The support of the math and literacy coaches has led to significant improvement in instruction. Focus areas have included making instruction explicit, using games to support math and access to interactive websites. The Saturday academy professional development program for the Reading First initiative has resulted in the teachers understanding the program and being able to make effective use of the new resources and assessments. The principal has now grouped teachers according to need in order to target future aspects of professional development. The next staff development day will focus on developing an emotionally responsive classroom with outside support from Bank Street College's Center for Emotionally Responsive Practice. Future focus areas include developing teachers' understanding of differentiation.

The majority of teachers have used intervisitations to share good practice and develop their instruction. The coaches are skilled professionals with a thorough knowledge of their subjects. They mentor teachers new to the profession and to the school and provide continuous support throughout the school for their subject areas. The result is a continuing professional dialogue that reflects the common school vision.

The school runs well, with the principal regularly reviewing procedures to support the well-being of all students. A recent example is the change to the lunchtime arrangements to have smaller groups of children eating at the same time and to offer opportunities for the children to exercise outside or to listen to music in classrooms. The impact, noted by all teachers, has been that the students' behavior has improved significantly with lower noise levels and more opportunities for enjoyment. The parents feel the school is very safe and provides a caring environment for their children, with one parent expressing that "this school has met my expectations and better." The principal and teachers make expectations for good behavior clear and teachers will readily call parents to talk about concerns. Teachers are positive about the impact on behavior of the Resolving Conflicts Creatively program.

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

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school is currently inconsistent in the level and detail of whole school evaluation against planned interim outcomes. The cabinet plans new initiatives to move the school forward around a central vision. These do not currently relate to the Comprehensive Education Plan or contain measurable outcomes against which progress can be reviewed. The Comprehensive Education Plan has long-term measurable goals, but no interim objectives. However, the principal and cabinet evaluate actions taken and make adjustments accordingly. The principal has clear individual goals and objectives.

Teachers use assessments to evaluate students' progress and adapt their instruction accordingly. The literacy coaches have developed detailed plans to target students who require support for their reading. These contain interim progress measures and clear plans for action. The cabinet now understands the value of applying this process to all students in the school and across subject areas.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Public School 361	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
Quality Score				X	

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school's plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.2 the school's plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?				X	
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to make strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan's interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?			X		
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X	