



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Elementary School 121**

**126-10 109<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11420**

**Principal: Henry Somers**

**Dates of review: October 15 - 16, 2007**

**Lead Reviewer: Jo Cheadle**

# Content of the report

## **Part 1: The School Context**

Information about the school

## **Part 2: Overview**

What the school does well  
What the school needs to improve

## **Part 3: Main Findings**

Progress made since the last review  
Overall evaluation  
How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

## **Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Public School 121 is an elementary school with 995 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 6. The school population comprises 27.6% Black, 17.8% Hispanic, 1.3% White, and 53.3% Asian students. The student body includes 3.2% English language learners and 3.6% special education students. Boys account for 50.6% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49.4%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006–2007 was 93.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 53% eligibility.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Leadership of the school is outstanding and the principal communicates his vision for the school's future extremely clearly.
- The school is very innovative in its work, continually seeking new and improved ways of meeting students' needs through an exciting curriculum.
- The designation of roles and responsibilities is highly effective, enabling the school to run in an exceptionally orderly and purposeful way.
- The school's work is highly collaborative, enabling staff to participate fully in using an excellent range of data to set goals and evaluate success.
- The school is extremely successful in meeting the needs of individual students, ensuring that they make continually good progress.
- Students' needs unfailingly dictate the extremely effective use of finances and other school resources.
- Members of staff recognize completely their accountability to ensure that students do as well as they can.
- Members of staff are committed to reflecting upon and changing their classroom practice in order to promote good student progress.
- Expectations of leaders, teachers and students are extremely high, encouraging a determination to continually develop and improve.
- Adults treat students with utmost respect, encouraging high levels of motivation, self-esteem and happiness.

### What the school needs to improve

- Continue to seek innovative ways of working with students who make slower rates of progress due to social and personal circumstances.
- Further increase the use of technology to enhance the quality of learning and encourage an even wider range of instructional techniques.
- Extend the work with individual parents to ensure that rates of attendance improve further.

## 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 outstanding.**

At Public School 121, there is an overwhelming commitment to ensuring that all members of staff meet the needs of every student in any way feasible. The unfailing aim is to enable students to make the best possible progress. To this end, the principal provides exemplary leadership. Members of staff respect him highly for his tenacity, innovation, exceedingly high expectations and tremendous care for the students. The principal has built an extremely strong and diverse team of professionals who are highly reflective of their work and dedicated to continual improvement. While the school's environment is wonderfully caring and happy, members of staff fully recognize and accept that school leaders will scrutinize their work rigorously and continually to ensure that it meets their high standards. The staff is extremely hard working, highly collaborative and fully aware of what they do well and where they need to improve. The effort and energy afforded by all who work at the school result in highly motivated students who make good progress and have high aspirations for their futures.

The school's inquiry team has made an excellent start to its work. Members of the team have identified a student group, delegated roles and responsibilities, agreed that the inquiry will center on students' reading and assessed the students using two diagnostic tests. They have gained further information about the students using the Scantron assessment tool, information that they will now analyze to evaluate the usefulness of the tool overall. The team has pinpointed trends in the results of diagnostic tests. They noted that students are generally weaker in non-fiction reading and that girls do not perform as well as boys. Team members have analyzed students' current performance in relation to their attendance and teachers have completed questionnaires regarding the social and emotional context for each student. They have noted that girls with attention deficit disorders performed less well than other students performed and discussed the implications this has for classroom practice. The team has drawn up action plans with very clear timeframes and measurable targets to evaluate success. Members have met with teachers over a "lunch and learn session" to discuss findings. The teacher center specialist, based at school, has begun working with teachers to model differentiation strategies and talk about research material that will further support instruction in the teaching of non-fiction reading skills.

The school has made good progress on the areas for improvement since the last Quality Review. A summer school program was in full operation for the first time this year. The school will closely monitor the progress of students who attended to evaluate the success of the program and refine work for next summer. As shown by the recent work of the inquiry team, the school continues to seek innovative ways of encouraging parental partnership, including a commitment to improving overall rates of attendance.

## **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 outstanding.**

The school's collection and analysis of student data is exceptional. Data analysis is the driving force behind all decisions the school makes. The leadership team has created extensive tracking systems for monitoring the performance of all students in various subgroups. These include subgroups that are particularly pertinent to the school, such as those students who are regular non-attendees, those who are continually absent from school at the beginning or end of the week and those who persistently arrive late. The school is highly aware of the impact of social and personal challenges on students' learning. There have been recent discussions using data pertaining to a subgroup of students with particularly difficult circumstances. These discussions have inspired plans for new intervention practices in an attempt to narrow the gap in achievement for these students. The school is particularly rigorous at monitoring its performance over time and uses the results of this analysis to set goals for future improvement. Not only does the school compare itself to other schools in similar contexts, but it also compares itself very critically to school's citywide. Leaders and faculty are proud that the school is now one of the top seven most improved schools citywide.

**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 outstanding.**

Leaders and faculty regularly use data in a highly collaborative way to set goals to improve student outcomes. Each of the four assistant principals has clearly delegated roles and responsibilities for grade groups and aspects of whole-school development that have a direct impact on student progress. They work very closely and effectively with teachers and support staff to measure how effective teaching is using periodic assessments, observations, discussions and feedback. This information constantly dictates the setting of targets for individual student, class, grade and subject across the school. Teachers have an extremely clear understanding of the goals they are working toward to ensure a constantly improving picture for student progress. They are well aware of student focus groups and receive excellent support to meet the needs of highlighted students. Their understanding of appropriate intervention strategies is continually developed and updated. In conversation with students, it is very clear that they know what they need to do to improve. They identify aspects of their work where they know they have made progress and say that teachers "really want us to learn". Parents report that the school informs them regularly about "next step" goals for their children.

The school constantly seeks ways to involve parents in meaningful and productive partnerships. The current work of the inquiry team provides good evidence of this. The team has decided to divide the student group with whom they are working into two smaller groups and make an additional study of how parental support affects progress. They plan to invite the parents of half of the group of students, using theater tickets as an incentive, to watch modeled guided reading lessons, encouraging them to use the same strategies at home. The team is convinced that further monitoring of the progress made by both

subsets of students will corroborate their belief in the power of parental support. School leaders plan to use this evidential information in communications to all parents at a later date in the hope that it will encourage the greater partnership and support at home that the school so desires.

**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 outstanding.**

The school is innovative and courageous in the actions it takes to align instructional strategy to student need. The choice of curriculum and organizational systems focuses solely on student need, not adult preferences. Teachers are highly aware that they need to be flexible, adapt their teaching styles and change instructional material to match effectively the ways in which students learn, and cater consistently for what they need to learn next. To this end, the school supplements all core teaching programs with very well differentiated materials to enable students of all achievement levels to make good progress. The organization of teaching groups reflects the same level of flexibility. Throughout the school, in reading, writing and math, students learn through introductory mini-lessons as mixed ability groups, but move to appropriately differentiated departmentalized activities for lesson extension. This requires an enormous commitment by all teachers to plan and organize themselves exceptionally well. They are fully aware of the high expectations set for them and strive to ultimately effective for the sake of the students. Students in most need of support also attend Saturday school, an additional opportunity for learning that has shown very positive impact on rates of progress. While there is a very good curriculum for the development of technology skills that support learning in all subjects, the school plans to improve further the quality of overall instruction by making more consistent and effective use of technology to aid both teaching and learning.

The principal applies extreme prudence in the use of finances and other resources to ensure that students receive the support they need. An example is that during English language arts and math sessions, students who need most support work with skilled specialists to improve their rates of progress. These groupings include high achieving students, who work with a specialized gifted and talented teacher. Staffing levels are high and this is because leaders are committed to ensuring that students are taught by teachers with the exact knowledge and skills to suit learning needs. Students work in small groups, with partners and on individually adapted activities in every space available around the school to ensure that they receive individualized instruction that helps them to make good progress. In addition, the principal is extremely effective in planning strategically to maintain standards in school by enabling replacement and new teachers to work alongside existing staff for up to two months prior to permanent placement. His innovative approach to improvement also includes ideas to maintain high levels of attendance at the school. Students with perfect attendance at the end of each week receive a ticket that is entered in an end of semester lottery draw in which they could win a bicycle. Students understand that the more complete weeks of attendance they have, the more tickets they will have, and the more chances to win.

**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 outstanding.**

The school has an excellent program for the professional development of its staff. The ultimate recognition that all members of staff are continuous learners enables the school to talk openly and honestly about areas of teaching that need to improve. The principal and school leaders make excellent use of the frequent opportunities they have to observe instruction to plan for the future development of staff. Teachers benefit enormously from the on-site training opportunities provided by the teacher center specialist, focused completely on the necessary aspects of development indicated by information on student progress. Teachers learn from each other through well-organized opportunities to observe colleagues' classroom practice. The school provides outstanding support to new teachers, who speak very highly of their colleagues and the learning opportunities afforded to them. Teachers are confident that the development opportunities they receive at PS121 support them in becoming excellent teachers. In an extremely well organized way, the school runs calmly and purposefully to encourage students' effective learning. Leaders work with outside partners to enhance opportunities for development and are currently seeking partnerships that will support the improvement of school buildings and outside areas. The school fully recognizes that partnerships with parents are the most vital of all and continues to work towards increased involvement from a wider parental group.

**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 outstanding.**

Leaders monitor the school's work with extreme rigor and at very regular intervals. They are extremely effective at evaluating the affect of planned actions and revising intervention strategies to secure high levels of success. The ability of leaders to critically analyze their work is the foundation of the school's continually upward trends. At regular lunchtime cabinet meetings, school leaders discuss the impact of all decisions and update the picture of where the school is. The sessions provide excellent opportunities to measure success at frequent intervals and redefine goals for teacher and student outcomes. The meetings enable immediate and ongoing evaluations of successes and shortfalls. The school is highly self-reflective and focuses extremely well on evidence gained from assessments, diagnostic tools and contextual information to set interim goals for improvement. All goals have clear success criteria measured in terms of student gains. Leaders use evaluations of prior plans very effectively to determine new goals for improvement and create new plans for the school's future work. The principal's vision for the purpose of the school is undeniably clear and communicated extremely effectively to the whole school community. All development plans focus ultimately on the successful realization of this shared vision.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME:</b>	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>					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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>					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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>					X

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>					<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
5.1 the school's plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable timeframes 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 timeframes 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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					<b>X</b>