



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Oakland Gardens School

Elementary School 203

**53-11 Springfield Boulevard
Queens
NY 11364**

Principal: Carole K Nussbaum

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Reviewer: Barbara Kwiecinski

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Oakland Gardens School is an elementary school with 750 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 2% Black, 7% Hispanic, 20% White, and 71% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 3% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 97%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

There is one homogeneous class and the rest heterogeneous classes, in each grade.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is greatly admired by parents, students and staff and provides exceptional leadership.
- Spectacular displays of students' work, throughout all hallways and classrooms celebrate student high achievement and success.
- Students enjoy greatly the very wide range of special programs that effectively support the core curriculum.
- The principal, assistant principal and inquiry team form a highly effective and widened administration to give excellent support to teachers and students.
- Students love coming to school and grow both personally and academically in a nurturing, safe and challenging environment.
- The induction program for new teachers is excellent and they feel very well supported by their mentors.
- Personalized and independent Investigation Method (IIM) and Talents Unlimited foster creativity through thinking and learning.
- Staff work extremely collaboratively to share expertise and undertake educational research that heighten reflection and effectively build on the consistently good practice.
- Parents work with the school in an advisory capacity and are given every opportunity to be involved in curriculum development and so are key partners in all aspects of school life.
- The school is highly evaluative and always looks for innovative ways to improve the students' learning experience.

What the school needs to improve

- Further extend the good strategic planning to set interim quantifiable goals and time frames in order to see if groups of students, across classes, grades and curriculum areas are on track to meet end-of-year goals.

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.

Oakland Gardens School is an exceptional place for students to learn. It enables every student to realize his or her full potential because the uniqueness of each individual is recognized and celebrated. Students leave the school as accomplished young people ready to face the challenges of the next stage of their education, academically and socially. They are very well equipped to live the school's mantra, "If you can imagine it, you can achieve it. If you can dream it you can become it". This results in all students striving for excellence and producing work of very high quality across a range of subjects that often blend seamlessly to provide a vibrant array of activities that fill students with contagious enthusiasm. A perfect example is the excellent early morning dance class. The quality of performance is exceptional and is just one aspect of the arts infusing all curriculum areas. Students speak very positively of the special programs and see connections between music, math, literacy and culture. Displays all around the school are testimony to this. Every corridor and hallway exhibits high quality, graded student work. Precise rubrics sit alongside the work, efficiently describing scoring criteria, which students have a very good knowledge of and readily take on board to reach even higher levels.

The environment is rich in vibrant learning opportunities. Students love being at the school and attendance is very high. They speak with pride about all aspects of school life and, in particular, about how the school enables them to acquire excellent research and enquiry skills. They are eager to explain in detail the level of their investigations. Students see themselves as investigators with a clear methodology to enable them to solve problems independently due to this personalized approach to learning.

At the heart of the school's success lies the exceptional leadership of the principal. She leads by example and has been the driving force behind creating an environment, which is steeped in high expectations, but one where learning is fun and exciting. The principal and staff go out of their way to create a caring community and one where everyone is encouraged to be 'risk takers' in the continuous quest for new skills. Professional development is high on the principal's agenda. She looks beyond that delivered locally which results in educational research underpinning all aspects of practice. Teachers are extremely reflective and continually look for ways to improve their performance. The principal has successfully tackled the one area identified in the previous review. She has built capacity and now has a highly effective extended administration team. This includes the inquiry team, which has made a very good start in its work. Daily meetings constantly review student data and so immediate and ongoing adjustments to programs ensure they always fit student need and continually build on the solid foundations that have been laid. The principal acknowledges that a sharper focus needs to be given to the setting of interim targets for students as they work towards their end of year goals. However, there is little doubt that the school's many outstanding strengths combine in providing an excellent, stimulating and exciting learning community where all students flourish.

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 principal has widened her administration to include the inquiry team as well as the assistant principal. Each member has clearly defined responsibilities. This team is highly effective at enabling the principal to build capacity. Collectively they work very well and ensure that all teachers have a strong grasp of the progress of students at individual, classroom and grade level. Assessment binders are of very high quality and are powerful tools in helping to accelerate students' progress. The data they contain is extensive and includes the results from periodic assessments, school assessments and State tests. The extensive data informs planning and instruction and results in all students receiving an excellent education. Student teacher conferencing is of very high quality and plays an important role in monitoring student performance. All teachers have prompt cards relating questioning to higher level thinking skills. This gives them the tools to assist asking open-ended questions matched to each student's levels.

All data is taken into account to place students in the very high performing homogeneous class and students know that their performance levels are reviewed monthly. Every term administration reviews the progress of each student, based on all available data. As a result of this interrogation, groupings and classes may change. Students described how class and group selection is made and think that the constant review of progress "makes you work harder". This is consistent for all students and the "aim higher ethos" is pertinent to all. Boys and girls perform equally well. This is accounted for by the emphasis on preferred learning styles, hands on learning, independent investigation and the understanding of research skills. Academic enrichment programs are provided for students who are working above grade level. This is having a very positive effect and the number of students achieving the higher levels is increasing year on year. The academic intervention team very effectively supports students at risk. Action research linked to student case studies is used to try to understand under performance. This includes five different levels of inquiry. This methodology is extended into the inquiry team who are tracking the performance of a large group of students.

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.

The school has established procedures to set individual goals for each student which build into its whole school goals. All staff work collaboratively to design and create action plans which outline imaginative ways to challenge students' thinking. The high levels of ongoing collaboration ensure everyone shares the school's vision for every student to achieve their potential. The principal uses poetry to challenge teachers to think whether what they and students are doing is high enough and so ensure high expectations are the norm in all conversations. This fires teachers' imagination, to plan more challenging work based on each students' individual goals.

Special education students are very well supported through personalized tailored programs and teaching that is targeted to their individual need. Whole school goals are shared with the wider community. Communication with parents is very effective and the school has systems in place enabling parents to give feedback on their children's learning. Parents are very supportive and constantly ask themselves the question "What can we do to help the school achieve their goals?" Parents explain that Oakland Gardens School is their choice as teacher expectations are so high. Communications between school and parents and caregivers are excellent and the orientation at the beginning of each year gives them an incisive insight into what their children will learn. In addition, teachers send monthly memos home, explaining curriculum coverage. Students talk animatedly about how well they are doing and are very knowledgeable about their State test results, their reading levels, their present performance and what they need to get better.

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 curriculum is packed full of diversity and vibrancy and makes an exceptional contribution to how well all students progress. A very high priority is given to English and math but this is not at the expense of other subjects. Story telling is given much prominence and opportunities are constantly capitalized on through this medium and through music to continually raise students' awareness of cultural diversity to a very high level. The arts are available to all students and pervade all aspects of school life. The combined talents of the school band, accordion band, Suzuki violinists, the dance and drama club results in the annual production of a Broadway musical and a spring concert. The quality is exceptional.

The school is very evaluative and as a consequence has changed its balanced literacy program. The school uses an alternative science curriculum, which meets the needs of its high performing students very well. Independent Investigation Method (IIM), a seven-step research model, helps students to become very accomplished investigators and enquirers. Teachers utilize data in an outstanding manner to guide and inform their instruction. Lessons are exciting and challenging in equal measure and teachers go the extra-mile to ensure that work is very accurately matched to students' individual abilities. It is in this stimulating but fun learning environment that students make rapid strides in progress, helped further by displays that provide many good quality learning prompts that students are only too ready to take on board. The extensive extra curricular activities give another dimension to learning and students thoroughly enjoy the challenge and variety. The school has a Lunar New Year committee who meet every week to plan the annual event. Students perform the traditional Chinese Dragon Dance, the Korean Fan Dance and perform Kamishibai storytelling. There is little doubt that the richness of learning and the quality of instruction are significant factors as to why students progress so well. Add to this the exceptional air of mutual respect that envelops the whole school community and it is no coincidence that students love coming to school and that attendance is so high.

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 professional development on offer for staff is excellent. The principal's contacts worldwide help her to identify challenging professional development that staff are only too willing to capitalize on. Teachers attend the Connecticut 'confratute' on an annual rolling program. Innovative ideas, such as Talents Unlimited, are brought back to the school which teachers turnkey and in turn have a significant impact on continually improving the quality of instruction and the students' learning.

The principal and assistant principal formally and informally observe teachers and are in classrooms daily. The quality of instruction in the school is consistently high and is further developed by an effective peer observation program. Observation criteria are defined, pre-observation meetings take place, and colleagues observe each other and give feedback. This is this as a very effective way of sharing practice and learning from each other. The resulting dialogue allows teachers to be constantly evaluating how they can make student learning even more dynamic and successful. Support for new teachers is exceptional. They freely gave up three days of their holiday time to be very effectively inducted by a member of the inquiry team. The training material for the three days is of high quality and the new teachers speak very positively about this. Two teacher mentors give high quality support. They meet with individual teachers on a weekly basis and observe their lessons weekly. The school's partnerships with community-based organizations are extensive. Cardozo High School works with the school to deliver their community service. Lower grade students enjoy being taught Spanish by high school students.

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.

The school is exceptional, at many levels, at evaluating individual student's progress throughout the year. The school then adapts plans and practices if there any indications that students' progress is not as accelerated as it should be. Teachers collaborate in an excellent manner in identifying what instruction works best. Teachers' readiness to learn from each other means that they will modify their practice if it is likely to lead to better student progress. Intervention programs are continually evaluated for their impact on student learning and to set the bar higher if the goals set need to be more challenging. A significant strength of the school is the manner in which professional development is used as a tool to promote high academic success. If initiatives from professional development activities lead to modification of instruction and learning, very good procedures are in place to measure the impact on student performance. It is crystal clear that both students and parents have a voice that is valued and respected. Teachers are ready to take on board their requests, if appropriate, for additional help or guidance or to evaluate what kind of learning may be best suited to their needs. There is little doubt that the school's rigor in evaluating student progress and its flexibility to adapt its plans to reach aspirational whole school goals is a winning combination. However, although the overall school strategic plan sets quantifiable goals in all key areas, as yet the targets emanating from this do not have interim goals and defined time frames for differing groups of students. The school's quest for excellence is tangible and all students are encouraged to "be themselves, develop their talents to the full, live by their own opinions and always consider the feelings of others". The principal and her staff help this become a reality.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Oaklands Garden School (PS203)	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