



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Beginning With Children Charter School

**11 Bartlett Street
Brooklyn
NY 11206**

Principal: Cynthia Bailey

Dates of review: May 4, 2007

Reviewer: Martyn Groucutt & Aamir Raza

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

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets Office of Charter School's (OCS) evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Beginning With Children is a Charter School for students from kindergarten through grade 8. There are currently 446 enrolled students, with a maximum enrollment of 450. This very small current shortfall is a result of recent student movement and in reality the school is operating at capacity, with a waiting list.

Of the current students there are 72 special education students, representing 14% of the total. In terms of ethnicity, 59% of the total are Hispanic, 35% Black, 5% White and 1% Asian. English language learners make up 7% of the total. Current attendance stands at 91.7%, which is around the city average. Attrition is low, though some students are lost at transfer to the middle school section.

There are no outstanding issues arising from a previous oversight report or annual report.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Administration, faculty and students are all committed to making this a successful school.
- There is very good support for professional and curriculum development.
- The early screening for students to identify potential special education and English language learner issues is effective.
- The visually stimulating classrooms and hallways help create an effective learning environment.
- The effective classroom walk-throughs which include representative teachers in the team, support effective instruction.
- The provision of specialist subject instruction in grades 4 and 5 helps prepare students for the middle school transition.
- Effective links with home, using a variety of forms of communication with provision in Spanish where needed, promotes effective partnerships.
- Very good use of technology as a tool for teaching and learning across the curriculum enables teachers to use computers to positive effect.
- The identification of preferred individual learning styles helps students to maximize their learning.
- The support and expertise of the Board reflects the commitment to success.
- The Board is well-balanced and has a strategic plan for the school.
- The school has active alumni and the college and high school program are excellent.
- The school has done fairly well segregating staff duties.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop the use of formal data to reduce the role of anecdotal evidence in tracking student progress and achievement.
- Develop benchmarking as a means of helping the school know how it is performing, how it compares with other schools and over time.
- Provide professional development to support teachers in increasing their challenge for gifted and talented students, so maximizing their potential.
- Provide more opportunities to observe good practice in other schools.
- Develop systems that enable information on student performance to be passed on to the middle school at transition.

- Extend the 'Vision Setting' meetings to include more stakeholders, including parents.
- The school needs an organizational makeover or restructuring that clarifies the roles and duties of each school based staff member and their relationship to the Beginning with Children Foundation.
- The Board needs to do more to empower individuals and allow them to carry out the responsibilities and daily operations of the school.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

Students come to this school from a wide geographical area within New York City. One very noticeable feature of the school is the commitment to its success shown by all who connected with it; the well informed and committed Board, the administration, faculty and other staff, parents and the students themselves. It also tries to play an active part in the network of Charter Schools within the city.

The school makes comparisons of its performance in standardized examinations against other schools in the District, with the City as a whole and across New York State. Results show performance well above average compared to District and City and comparable with those of the State. This is a very good performance when it is considered that the school takes urban children through an open lottery system and that it has an above average number of special education students or students needing some kind of additional support. The school has identified that 36% of their intake fall into these categories. The school has, through the use of effective displays combining printed, teacher made and student produced materials, created a stimulating visual display around the classrooms and hallways that helps make the school an attractive learning environment in which all can participate.

It is currently based in two separate, but fairly close, buildings. The lower grades are based in their own building which was converted from former industrial premises, while the upper grades are on the top floor of a public high school, which does create some issues for effective communication and is a factor in student attrition on transfer to the middle school years.

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 proficient.

The school acknowledges the need to continue the development of a robust system of data collection so that it can distance itself from a former over reliance on the use of anecdotes. It has made strides forward this year in terms of its collection and use of data, and this now needs to become embedded in good practice. This information will ensure

that the school develops its system for benchmarking so that it can better make both internal comparisons and against other schools.

The school now uses data in a variety of forms. For example, bi-annual formative assessments provide evidence of individual progress in addition to the information provided by State and City tests from the third grade onwards. This is monitored alongside comparable information, such as patterns of attendance or tardiness to check for any links between achievement and other factors. Data collection starts in kindergarten, which in this preliminary year includes screening to seek to identify students who may have difficulties through being potential special education students or English language learners. This is proving to be effective in supporting the early identification of issues that might delay progress for some individual students over time and allows groups of students to be followed carefully through the school.

The school makes comparison of its results in external examinations with the other schools in the District, the City and the State. Its performance far outstrips those of District and City and the best comparisons are against those with the State. The school is aware that refinement in the use of data will support a more sophisticated comparison and enable the school to challenge itself even more in improving its levels of performance. Similarly, the development of effective systems of benchmarking will support the ability to make comparisons against past performance and among students, grades, subjects, and ethnic or other groupings.

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 increasing use of data is supporting administration and faculty in setting demanding and measurable goals for students’ progress. The early identification of potential difficulties enables students to be tracked and care is taken to improve the performance and progress of those in most need. However, teachers feel that they need more professional development in ensuring additional challenge is in place for the gifted and talented students. An interesting development has been the identification of each student’s preferred learning style so that teachers can seek to ensure that these are addressed in individual teaching.

In the lower grades the teachers meet together to plan both formally and informally, across the grades for kindergarten through 3rd grade, and as subject teachers from then onwards. However, there is currently a lack of common planning time for the teachers in the middle school grades and information on student performance is not passed consistently between the two sites when students’ transfer. The development of subject teaching from the 4th grade helps students make the transition to middle school while remaining in a familiar environment. This has been a successful innovation.

There are high expectations for all students and, in supporting them; parents are seen as key partners. Some parents have been trained as Learning Leaders, working in classrooms to support the class teachers. The school maintains contact with homes in a variety of ways and parental views are sought frequently. Many teachers give phone or e-mail contacts to parents to keep in close touch. However, parents are not yet members of

the 'Vision Setting' group, although they reflect a great commitment to the progress of the school as well as to that of their own children. At the Board level, there is considerable educational and financial expertise which provides very good support in helping the school move forward.

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.

The school takes care to ensure that its curriculum is aligned with the mandated curriculum and the requirements of the State and City tests. Work has been undertaken over the past year in refining the use of data available on group and individual performance with a view to further improving the already good results being obtained.

Teachers are accountable for maximizing the performance and outcomes of their students, and they receive very good support in terms of professional and curriculum development to enable them to do this. During the past year there has been a focus on differentiated instruction and changing practice to meet the identified needs of individual students. Individual support is also offered through the after school program and summer school. Individual help in developing reading skills is offered through a middle school mentoring program in which older students support their younger friends. Those senior students who do well are offered paid employment at summer school to maintain the program.

The students see themselves as partners in the success of the school and they are actively engaged in learning, reflected very well in the video Year Book that was filmed by some of the senior students. This also reflects the good use of technology in the school.

Care has been taken in the hiring of the teachers and this is reflected not only in their effectiveness in the classroom, but also in their commitment to the school. However, there has been some instability in middle school English language arts, caused in part by the lack of common planning time. Although the budget has been tight it has been well targeted and external funding has been sought, such as in the grant to buy new computers which are put to good use in all curriculum areas.

Attendance is around the city average despite the considerable distances that some students have to travel to school. Satisfactory arrangements are in place to intervene when appropriate.

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.

All leaders, faculty and staff show a commitment to the school, which is appreciated and shared by the students. The school has been fortunate in the caliber of the applicants who have sought positions, although all are held to account when hired. On occasion, when there has been a problem, a teacher's contract has been terminated. However, good staff developer support is offered in modeling lessons, observing lessons and providing detailed support.

In the lower grades there is a high level of interaction between teachers, although this is more limited by time pressures in the middle school grades. Teachers get good support in helping them refine their practice, including the use of data, however this is a work in progress as systems are further refined. This has been a particular focus in staff development over the past year to further strengthen professional practice.

Professional development is, to an extent, differentiated, and takes into account the experience and professional development needs of the teacher concerned. New teachers receive not only the support of a mentor, but very practical help from the new teacher support group, which has proved popular and helpful. In some cases teachers are also paired, for example a veteran teacher working with a newly qualified colleague. A very positive feature of the process for informal observations is that the development of a walk-through team that includes a teacher representative as well as members of the administration. Observations are seen as a positive learning experience to support teachers in developing best practice. At the moment there is no real opportunity for teachers to observe the best practice elsewhere.

There are some positive links with outside bodies that support and extend the curriculum. For example, links with Brooklyn Philharmonic, Literacy Incorporated and the Pratt Institute which supports art in the after school program and Saturday Academy.

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 proficient.

Goal planning for the school is seen as the responsibility of the leadership team. The team creates an action plan, in part based on the needs identified through data and targets, although this has been a developing area. Since the systems for the use of data have been developed and refined, so has the ability to make effective comparisons of performance within and across classrooms.

The regular use of internal assessments, coupled with an analysis of anecdotes, such as conferencing notes of teachers, are used to place students in one of four groupings within each grade. Groups are reorganized in a flexible way, during the year to reflect the individual progress reflected in the data created. This process allows interim and final goals to be amended in the light of emerging evidence. Information about individual student performance is gathered and included in teacher folders. In the lower grades, at the end of each school year, this information is passed on to the teacher receiving the group in the following September, but this does not happen on admission to the middle school. This creates a system where there are large areas of good practice which support successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, but the system is not uniformly effective throughout the whole school.

Quality Statement 6 – School’s Board has provided “effective” oversight and leadership as needed and is functioning in accordance with the agreed upon charter.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The Board is responsible for the overall direction and fiscal well being of the school. As such, the Board has the authority and duty to adopt policies and by-laws that are necessary to meet its statutory responsibilities and produce optimal academic results. Those administrative and daily operational responsibilities need to be delegated to principals, senior management/administrators, and board appointed officers to manage the school within the established policies. The principal senior administrators, and board appointed officers should then be held accountable for performance.

Beginning with Children Charter School’s (BwC) Board of Trustees is functioning as stipulated by charter contract. The Board is equipped with legal, non profit, finance/banking, entrepreneur, and education expertise to continue providing guidance in policy implementation. The school board has good potential given the expertise on the board; however, it appears that several decisions are not being made at decentralized level. This may stall empowerment of school based staff, decentralized decision making, and staff’s ability to be held accountable for decisions they choose to make. The Board is highly recommended to further develop mechanisms to empower the school based staff to carry on responsibilities in positions that they hold or were hired for. The Board conducts formal evaluation of the school leader each school year. They have expressed desire to bring on some new members moving forward.

The Board of Trustees has been presented with sufficient financial, educational data and other relevant information during board meetings to make informed decisions and work collaboratively towards the school’s stated mission. The Board approved budget is consistently monitored and compared to year-to-date expense, variance analyzed, and justifications provided by staff. The budget preparation process involves principal, business manager and other board members.

NOTE:

All issues raised in previous oversight report in this category were addressed by the school.

Quality Statement 7 – School has developed internal controls in place to detect and prevent financial fraud. School has written policies to guide ongoing operations and those policies are followed by school employees.

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

BwC maintains adequate internal controls to prevent fraud. All school based assets were found to be tagged. A sampling of invoices, purchase orders, and proof of payment was conducted during the site visit. No material weakness was found. However, there are processes where BwC could make further improvements. The school may adopt a centralized supply order procedure/system. BwC has proper documentation in place and the school is following policies adopted by the Board of Trustees.

NOTE:

All issues raised in previous oversight report in this category were addressed by the school.

Quality Statement 8 – Based on the most recent financial statements, school is in sound fiscal condition.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

A charter school should be able to operate with an annual budget that reflects the expected revenue and expenses for the fiscal year. Since the revenue stream for charter schools tend to be based upon the number of students served (per pupil revenue) and the State and Federal grant (Title funding, etc...) funding, a continued and growing negative net balance poses threat to school's stability and the ability to fulfill its short and long-term financial obligations.

Based on BwC's financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2006, BwC is in excellent financial condition. The school spent 90% of its funds on educational activities and less than 9.6% on administrative expenses. The school continues to enjoy good financial outlook with a fair ability to meet its short term financial obligations.

NOTE:

All issues raised in previous oversight report in this category were addressed by the school.

Quality Statement 9 – School has the structure to integrate parents and community partners in the school.

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

Overall, parents hold a positive opinion about the school in this category. They praised relationship with teachers, innovation and creative thinking. Parents also acknowledged their kids improvement in writing, speech, independent thinking, social responsibility, and adequate services provided in special education, where applicable. Parents expressed concerns over location of the middle school due to other school's students' presence. They were concerned about the safety of their children. Parents were aware of the board meeting and acknowledged receiving notification of board meetings (notice also posted at school) in the past.

The school has regular parent teacher conference in place to incorporate parental input into the program. In addition, BwC has various planned parent awareness events and meetings opportunities in place to encourage continued parent and community participation.

NOTE:

All issues raised in previous oversight report in this category were addressed by the school.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Beginning With Children Charter School	∅	✓	+
Quality Score			

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	

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	
Quality Statement 6 – School’s Board has provided “effective” oversight and leadership as needed and is functioning in accordance with the agreed upon charter.			∅	✓	+
6.1	The Board size, structure and composition are appropriate. The membership is diverse (G/S/E) and compliments a broad skill set.		X		
6.2	Board functions as stipulated by contract, and is a well-functioning organization.		X		
6.3	Board has adopted and communicated the whistleblower policy with staff members.		X		
6.4	Board has provided effective oversight in operational, fiscal, academic, hiring & firing (as appropriate) issues of the school.		X		
6.5	Board conflicts (if any) were resolved in timely fashion and had no effect on school operations.				X
6.6	Board evaluates partner organization at least once a year. OCS was notified of any changes in partnership agreement.		X		
6.7	Board has been responsive to both parent and school staff concerns/complaints (if any)				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 6				X	

Quality Statement 7 – School has developed internal controls in place to detect and prevent financial fraud. School has written policies to guide ongoing operations and those policies are followed by school employees.	Ø	✓	+
7.1 School has a comprehensive financial control system in place. Check signing, procurement, inventory controls, bank reconciliation, travel reimbursement, investment, petty cash, conflict of interest, vacation and sick leave, bonus relocation, etc. policy is in place.		X	
7.2 School has segregated staff duties to prevent and detect fraud.			X
7.3 School is consistently following its adopted financial procedures for requisition approval, certification of funds and placing of orders for goods.			X
7.4 School's employees are familiar with school's established financial procedures.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 7			X
Quality Statement 8 – Based on the most recent financial statements, school is in sound fiscal condition.	Ø	✓	+
8.1 School's total educational expense / total expense ratio is above 70% for this fiscal year.			X
8.2 School's administrative ratio is under 30% for this fiscal year.			X
8.3 School's current ratio is greater than or equal to 2.0.		X	
8.4 School's debt to asset ratio is less than or equal to 1.0.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 8			X
Quality Statement 9 – School has structure to integrate parents and community partners in the school.	Ø	✓	+
9.1 School has a parent organization or a parent teacher organization.		X	
9.2 School has special events for parents to meet, discuss issues and socialize with each other.			X
9.3 Parents are informed of the time and location of the open Board meetings.			X
9.4 Newsletters are sent in all predominant languages of the neighborhood to encourage parent participation and eliminate cultural and language barriers.			X
9.5 Parent handbook stipulates the appeals process should a conflict arise.		X	
9.6 Has a clear idea of how the pupil has improved since attending this school.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 9			X

***Note on Statement 8: School's current year in operation and other extenuating circumstances (facilities acquisition, capital renovation, etc.) will be taken into account while assigning a grade.**