



<b>Client name</b>	School District of Philadelphia
<b>School name</b>	Blankenburg ES
<b>Principal name</b>	Kelly Parker
<b>Address</b>	4600 W. GIRARD AVE.
	Philadelphia, PA 19131
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<b>Lead reviewer</b>	Melissa Lara
<b>Team reviewer(s)</b>	Adrian Mims
<b>Canvassing Lead</b>	Linda Hargrow

# School Quality Review Report

## School District of Philadelphia

Blankenburg Elementary School

October-November 2016

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# 1 The School Context

## 1.1 Introduction

In September 2016 Cambridge Education was awarded a contract against RFP-499 to provide School Quality Reviews (SQRs) to eleven School District of Philadelphia (SDP) schools. The scope of these Reviews is greater than a standard SQR, in that each SQR has a “Community Engagement and Feedback Focus”, which involves collecting input from as many school community stakeholders as possible. The SQR program includes the following:

- a School Quality Review (SQR) orientation for principals
- a two-day SQR for each school (5 elementary; 1 middle; 5 high)
- The equivalent of a third day, during which an SQR team member collects additional stakeholder feedback via small group meetings, one-on-one interviews; phone calls, etc.
- Three community “town hall style” focus groups
- A Community Stakeholder Survey
- A meta-analysis report of the school findings

The SQR report contained herein was prepared by the Lead Reviewer based on the evidence collected and the assessment made by the full SQR team (Lead Reviewer, Team Member Reviewer; Canvasing Lead). Evidence was collected via classroom observations; interviews with the administration; and focus groups with students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders.

## 1.2 Background information about the School

Blankenburg is located in the Overbrook section of West Philadelphia. As a result of public school closures over the past five years, the school population now includes students and families from outside their catchment area. There are approximately 501 students enrolled in grades K-8. The enrollment changes frequently due to the constant movement of students in and out of the area. The school serves students from six homeless shelters in the area.

This is the principal’s second year in leadership at the school. There is no assistant principal to share the leadership responsibilities.

The school is in the process of implementing the newly adopted reading and math programs.

### 1.3 School demographic and performance data

#### Blankenbrug ES

	Academic Year (e.g. 2014-15) Previous Year	Academic Year (e.g. 2015-16) Most updated data before QR
Grades:	K-8	K-8
Number of students enrolled:	487	505
Percentage of general education students:	75%	81.6%
Percentage of special education students:	25%	18.4%
Percentage of English language learner students:		0.2%
In school suspensions:		
Out of school suspensions:	95	
Percentage of students that are Title 1 eligible:	100%	100%
Latest attendance percentage:	93	
Ethnic make- up of the students (percentages):	African American	93.5
	White	1
	Asian	0
	Latino	1.4
	Pacific Islander	0
	American Indian	0
	Other	4.2

#### State Test Results - Percentage of students at or above proficient

Subject Area	School 2012	School 2013	School 2014	School 2015	District 2015	State 2015
English Language Arts	37	30	31	17	32	60
Math	42	33	25	4	17	39.6
Science	29	29	19	20	37	67.7
Social Studies						
Others						

\*The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) is an annual assessment administered in commonwealth classrooms in grades 3 through 8, and in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Science scores are usually from grade 4 and 8 for Elementary and Middle school.

Only grade 11 scores are included for High school (school, district, and state)

The Keystone Exams are one component of Pennsylvania's new system of high school graduation requirements. (data available for grade 11 in Algebra I, Literature, and Biology)

## 2 SQR Main Findings

In this section of the report, the SQR team has identified the factors that are most significantly supporting and limiting effective student learning.

### 2.1 Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. The principal is successfully building positive, trusting and productive relationships with parents, students and staff. He is well respected, approachable, highly visible and is beginning to raise expectations for student achievement.
- ii. The majority of students feel cared about by most adults in the school. The reduced number of fights in the school is making many students feel safer inside the school.
- iii. A full time counselor and nurse were added to the school staff this year. An instructional coach has also been added. As a result, the principal now has more time available to focus on improving the quality of learning and teaching, and more students are able to receive immediate health and social/emotional support provided by the nurse and counselor.
- iv. Appropriate student behavior and accomplishments are recognized and celebrated in a variety of ways, including certificates, points for field trips, pretzels, and other incentives that students enjoy. ClassDojo is proving to be effective in promoting positive behavior by students and as a form of frequent and timely communication to parents.
- v. Students benefit directly from partnerships with external organizations and agencies. For example, WE PACK volunteers operate the school library, a local church provides Christmas gifts, uniforms, coats and more, and dental screenings and glasses are provided by local agencies. Several other partnerships have a positive impact on the social and emotional health of students.

### 2.2 Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. The school facilities are not adequately maintained, which is having a direct impact on the quality of learning and teaching, school culture and safety. For example, the building has exposed wires, peeling walls, insufficient lighting, and restroom problems. Most classrooms have only one working electrical outlet. There are multiple issues related to the portable space used for lunch, including bad smells, weak places in the floor, insufficient space, roaches, and no breezeway connecting to the main building.
- ii. The quality of learning and teaching is not as effective as it could be because:
  - o The level of rigor is very low in most lessons. Questions posed to students are mostly low cognitive levels. Tasks are often low level; for example, a worksheet given to the whole class in a math lesson was at least three grade levels too low.
  - o Data is not used effectively to differentiate instruction, resulting in mostly whole group, teacher-led lessons. Monthly lesson plans do not reflect adequate planning for the day-to-day instruction. Therefore, teachers are not well prepared to deliver high quality instruction.
  - o There are few opportunities for students to work collaboratively on group projects that require students to develop critical thinking skills and delve deeper into the content.
- iii. Grade level meetings do not function as professional learning communities. Therefore, teachers are not adequately planning, sharing successful instructional strategies, developing high quality common assessments, digging deeply into student data, vertically aligning the curriculum, or having sufficient opportunity to grow professionally.
- iv. Resources, including human and instructional materials, are very limited. Having only one instructional coach to support grades K-8 does not provide the level of support that teachers need. Student enrollment fluctuates frequently. One classroom had over the state limit of students because

teaching slots have not been added. Many teachers do not have the materials that they need to provide students with frequent hands-on activities and in-depth projects to support their learning.

## 3 Individual Domains

In the sections below, each domain received a rating based on the evidence collected during the SQR. The judgments have been broken down into *Factors that Support Effective Student Learning* and *Factors that Limit Effective Student Learning*.

### 3.1 Domain 1: Quality of Learning & Teaching

**The Quality of Learning & Teaching requires support in targeted areas**

**Factors that support effective student learning:**

- i. Most teachers post an identified learning objective for reading and math.
- ii. Some teachers do well in creating positive classroom cultures that nurture and support the development of the social and emotional learning needs of their students.
- iii. Teachers use technology primarily for the Lexia reading software and other web-based intervention and practice programs.
- iv. Students are very aware of the expectations for achievement on the Lexia reading software, although they are not as knowledgeable of other achievement goals that they should be working towards.

**Factors that limit effective student learning:**

- i. Teachers have access to a range of data. However, data is not used as effectively as it should be to plan and deliver instruction that meets the learning needs of all students. Most lessons are whole group with very little differentiation to acknowledge different learning styles and varying achievement levels.
- ii. Teachers reference state standards in their monthly instructional plans. However, delivery of instruction often lacks learning experiences that engage and motivate students. Students are not frequently engaged in activities that facilitate collaborative group work or opportunities to discuss their learning.
- iii. Sharing of learning objectives and success criteria with students, and ensuring they understand the purpose of the lesson and how they will know they have learned the objective, is not consistently communicated in all lessons. As a result, students are not clear on what they are expected to achieve at the end of each lesson.
- iv. The level of instructional rigor is low in most lessons. Students are seldom challenged in ways that promote critical thinking or facilitate multifaceted problem solving, which reduces students' abilities to become independent learners. The level of questions that students are expected to respond to are generally of low cognitive level. Students are not prompted to think deeper and differently about the content through probing questions.

### 3.2 Domain 2: Curriculum & Assessment

#### Curriculum & Assessment requires support in targeted areas

##### Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. School leaders and teachers ensure that the written school curriculum is aligned to state standards, as evidenced in district scope and sequence, monthly lesson plans and posted lesson objectives.
- ii. The curriculum provides students with learning experiences beyond the core areas, including art and physical education. Students would like to see the offered courses extended to include music classes.
- iii. Teachers have access to assessments such as district benchmarks, DRA, and Lexia. They are just beginning to work towards developing teacher made common assessments.
- iv. Homework complexity and time required to complete it varies from class to class. An afterschool program provides some assistance with homework. There is some challenge with consistency in personnel providing the service. The principal has recently acquired additional funding to provide afterschool programs, which will be commencing soon.

##### Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. Low expectations and rigor are manifested in the lack of opportunities for students to work in depth on projects and problems that require students to apply a wide range of skills, understand multiple concepts and solve challenging problems. Teachers, students, and school leaders reference that limited resources (materials) reduce their ability to provide more hands-on activities and in-depth projects that could enhance student learning.
- ii. The current delivery of the curriculum does not sufficiently prepare students for high school, college or future career paths. Many students are not mastering basic skills required to be proficient on the state assessment.

### 3.3 Domain 3: Leadership, Management and Accountability

#### Leadership, Management and Accountability requires support in targeted areas

##### Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. The principal promotes high expectations for students and is building relationships with them to further support and motivate students. The principal and instructional coach are beginning to raise expectations of the teachers to improve instructional practices. Since arriving, the principal has made strategic personnel changes in the hopes of raising student achievement.
- ii. Teachers are being held accountable for student academic and social achievements through data conversations, review of lesson plans, lesson observations, and frequent visits by the principal. The relationships he has fostered with teachers over the last year is creating a professional culture where teachers feel supported by him and open to conversations around improvement.
- iii. The principal is beginning to visit classrooms more frequently now that a full time counselor has been hired to free-up some of his time. Teachers receive immediate feedback from their observations and report that the feedback is often helpful and practical.
- iv. Processes and procedures have been implemented to help the school run smoothly. For example, the morning entrance process provides an opportunity for all students and staff to meet together to begin their day, followed by an orderly process going to classes. Transitions in hallways are generally smooth and orderly. Students report fewer fights because of the relationships the principal has established and that he has shown that he cares about the students.
- v. School leaders are taking active measures to promote and improve student attendance. For example, ClassDojo is used more frequently to earn points for attendance; awards and acknowledgements of good attendance are frequent; and the climate manager and school counselor are proactive in following up on student absences and tardiness. Although attendance is still a challenge, it is improving slightly.
- vi. The district and principal recognized there was a significant need for a full time nurse and school counselor. This year, the district allocated funding to make both positions full time. As a result, students have additional support and the principal is available to concentrate more on raising student achievement.

##### Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. Although stakeholders agree that the school is working toward providing students with a good education, how the school plans to achieve that is not widely understood by all stakeholders. Few stakeholders provided input into the development of the school improvement plan.
- ii. While school leaders use the wide range of data available to make some decisions about staffing and track some student progress, it is not always explored deeply enough. For example, the school refers to a high transient population as a significant challenge. However, they do not compare the data of students who attend continuously from K-8 with those only there for a short period, to definitively identify the impact of instruction on consistent versus transient students, or specifically identify additional areas of strength and challenge.
- iii. School leaders make site based decisions regarding staff selected to work at the school. However, efforts to actively recruit are limited to candidates provided by the district.

### 3.4 Domain 4: The Culture of Learning

#### The Culture of Learning requires support in targeted areas

##### Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. The principal promotes and models positive and mutually respectful relationships with stakeholders. Many teachers engage in positive relationships with students, families, and their peers.
- ii. Most students feel emotionally safe at school and are able to reach out to a caring adult at the school for help if needed.

##### Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. The condition of the buildings is having a negative impact on the way in which students, parents, and staff feel that the school and the students are valued by the district. There are some issues with the school facilities that could impact safety at times.

### 3.5 Domain 5: Family and Community Engagement

#### Family and Community Engagement requires support in targeted areas

##### Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. The school uses a variety of strategies to keep parents informed, and continues to reach out to parents through phone calls, ClassDojo, newsletters, the school website and, sometimes, home visits by school leaders. Parents are provided frequent updates on their children's progress through student folders, ClassDojo and the standard progress reports and report cards.
- ii. Parents are able to voice their concerns and contribute to some decision making in the school through the School Advisory Council (SAC), Title I surveys and independent surveys sent home by the school. Parents also feel they can easily approach the principal to share their concerns and provide input into decisions. This open-door policy also supports parents' ability to advocate for their children.
- iii. The school provides a range of social and emotional support for students including a psychologist who visits the school regularly to support students, so that parents have easy access to testing for their children. Other agencies and community groups provide support through donations of Christmas gifts, uniforms, glasses, dental screenings and other items.
- iv. School leaders and teachers celebrate student successes and accomplishments frequently and in a variety of ways. For example, awards such as pretzels, movies, and other incentives are highly valued by the students and most are eager to earn them. Awards and incentives are behavior and academic based.

##### Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. Students are required to make decisions about which high school they wish to attend in the eighth grade. The high schools have specific requirements, such as grades and attendance, to order be admitted into specialty programs. Students and families have not previously been adequately informed or counseled about these requirements early enough in the students' education to encourage and support students to best prepare themselves for the high school program of their choice. The newly hired full time counselor and school leaders are beginning to address this concern.
- ii. Although there is some support for students' social and emotional development, there is less provision for additional academic support. For example, there is only the after school program that provides some homework assistance; there is no established tutoring program or other extended academic supports.
- iii. There are a few consistent parent volunteers who donate their time to the school. Efforts have yet to be made to further develop and grow in this area in order to have a well-defined and coordinated volunteer system. Although there are many students who could benefit from having a positive mentor/role model, efforts to coordinate and partner with organizations to do so have not occurred.

## 4 Community Engagement and Feedback Focus

This section of the report pertains to the wider Community Engagement and Feedback Focus component of the SQR process. These activities included two community focus groups, small group meetings, one-on-one interviews, as well as a community stakeholder survey. Community members and stakeholders provide valuable contributions to the improvement of schools, and they supplied a significant amount of meaningful feedback that enhanced the overall SQR process.

### 4.1 Areas of Strength for the School:

- i. The principal is well liked and respected by families and the community. They have faith in him to move the school forward.
- ii. The school welcomes community organizations and agencies who want to support students.
- iii. Volunteers have opened up the library for students, enabling teachers to bring students to the school library on a regular basis.
- iv. The staff genuinely care about the students.

### 4.2 Areas of Improvement for the School:

- i. Parents are not always sure how to best support their children with their academics, especially with homework.
- ii. There are not enough afterschool programs available to students to assist with academics or cultivate school pride.
- iii. The school has insufficient resources available to provide students and teachers with the materials and support they need to be successful.
- iv. Many parents are not actively involved in supporting the school.
- v. The school building is out of date. For example, classrooms have only one power outlet, therefore it is difficult to charge laptops or have additional technology.

### 4.3 Stakeholders' views regarding school improvement:

*Stakeholders made the follow suggestions of how to improve the school:*

- i. Reduce class sizes.
- ii. Teachers need additional support in classrooms to assist with struggling and disruptive students.
- iii. More NDAs needed both for the yard and for increasing hallway monitoring.
- iv. Some parents would like more opportunities for parent workshops that focus on supporting students' academics, specifically with homework.
- v. Students would benefit from additional afterschool programs, such as sports, to develop school pride.
- vi. Parents may become more involved if community resources were available to them. For example, informational sessions about housing, electric (LIHEAP), and other areas that support parents in their everyday living.
- vii. The school buildings should be updated and the toilets must be fixed.

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## A. Community Stakeholders' Input

**Families, community members/partners, staff and students shared their perspectives on a range of topics. The following are quotes collected during the School Quality Review and FACE Canvassing activities.**

The following are typical of the comments made about the principal:

- *If the principal had more (resources) he could do more.*
- *The principal smiles because he wants to, not because he has to.*
- *He's highly visible and accessible.*
- *His personality gets more from me. (teacher)*
- *He gives us praise as well as ways to get better.*
- *He makes time.*
- *The principal is very hands on. He's one of the best we've had.*

The following are typical comments made about the teachers:

- *Teachers are nicer now.*
- *My teacher says you have power to your words.*
- *No problem with the staff. I love everybody here.*
- *Give us the resources and we will get the job done.*
- *They are real people who care. I can talk to them whenever I need support.*

The following are typical comments made about school culture:

- *Kids and families know each other. It's family like.*
- *The kids are amazing, resilient and underserved.*
- *The climate is quieter.*
- *This is the first time in years we don't see students running all over the building.*

The following are typical comments made about communication:

- *I like Dojo. I can keep up with my child daily.*
- *We hear about what's going on in lots of way -.robo calls, SAC monthly meeting notes, Dojo and other parents.*
- *We receive notes from teachers individually.*

The following are typical comments made about engaging families and community members:

- *We are building wrap around services with the community's help.*
- *We don't have much turn out on report card conferences. Parents don't come in for those things.*
- *The volunteer parents are great.*
- *The principal welcomed city services.*
- *Parent educational workshops would help me support my child at home with homework.*

## **B. Community Survey Data**

There were no survey responses for Blankenburg Elementary School.

