
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

The Brooklyn School for Global Scholars, P.S. 748
New York City Public Schools
Brooklyn, New York

Transcript: Still Making the Grade: From a G & T District School to a Top Neighborhood School

Narrator: In 2009, New York City Principal Ursula Annio received an irresistible offer.

Ursula Annio, Principal: I was asked by the superintendent of District 20 to write a proposal for a new school in our district. It was custom-built on the philosophy that all children could learn and that we were really catering to the whole child, so we developed a curriculum that was standards-based but authentic, meaning that it was interdisciplinary and it showed the connections between all subject areas.

Narrator: The proposal was accepted—for an application, Gifted and Talented school. P.S. 748, The Brooklyn School for Global Scholars, opened in 2010. Assistant Principal Jennifer Guido was a founding teacher and curriculum developer.

Jennifer Guido Assistant Principal: Each grade comes up, came up with, three essential questions for each unit of study. We ask students and teachers to say, hmm, what does this question mean to us, what does it mean to our outside community, what does it mean to the global community? And how can we answer this question using what we learn in ELA, in math, in science, and social studies.

Narrator: Students thrived. In 2014, in response to overcrowding, District 20 converted PS 748 to a zoned, neighborhood school. As the G & T students aged out, the student body changed. But the curriculum didn't. Siobhan Lorina is an Intervention Specialist in Math.

Siobhan Lorina, Math Intervention Specialist: The fact is that the standards don't change. So our path was essentially the same as far as the vision and the curriculum and the project-based learning and hands-on approach. What was different is what does each child that is coming into your classroom need—what scaffolds they need, what support do they need, and how can we now meet them now where they are and bring them where we want them to be.

Narrator: Kindergarten teacher Anna Doktor-Vaynblat was initially hired as a Gifted and Talented teacher.

Anna Doktor-Vaynblat: We built the curriculum from the ground up, so we want to give the same experiences to all of our students. However, the supports that we put in place such as vocabulary background knowledge, diving into the experience a little bit deeper so they have a better understanding of what is expected of them. That has adjusted with our growing population. ... So we talked about patterns we see in different types of homes and we are going to use those patterns to, uh, build for the Three Little Pigs that the wolf won't be able to blow down. And this is helping us to build vocabulary, oral language and students will be able to use this to retell the story.

SOUND ON TAPE: Rosemarie DiVirgilio: "How is Mop going to reach that bone? What do you think Mop is going to have to do?" Student: "Jump!" Rosemarie: you're right! He might have to jump"

Jennifer Guido: I think that was that we had one defining year, I think, was it last year that was really defining for us where we had a very low G&T population testing. You know, and Ursula and I said to ourselves, this is the year—this is the year we're going to see— and we maintained those scores.

Narrator: Jessica Sullivan is a founding fifth grade math and science teacher.

Jessica Sullivan, Grade 5 Math and Science Teacher: Today my students were doing a math talk. It was an algebra situation but my students were using things like charts and table and expressions and pictures to break down what could be a much higher-level question if we were using variables. The emphasis is on these problem-solving skills which they can apply to math class or any life situation. Part of that is the conversations that they can have.

Narrator: Teaching in grades three through five is departmentalized by English Language Arts and Social Studies and Math and Science. Fourth grade teachers describe an interdisciplinary project as part of an Instructional Team meeting.

Teacher 1: Last year they got very engaged in historical fiction and it just actually lead to a study of the Titanic through guided questions it really was a series of questions until we got to the final question which was, "Could the tragedy have been prevented?" And we used authentic text and articles to help guide us. And the students knew everything about every passenger on that ship. Every passenger, every passenger.

Teacher 2: when they came into my room they actually had to start with a soup can, and then they had a plethora of materials to work with but they had to think of that soup can as a person and actually create a life vest for it. And then they used the weight and buoyancy in a whole ratio formula to figure out exactly how long they would have been able to stay afloat in those freezing waters for.

Teacher 1: It also really started to develop into real life issues—the division of classes too.

Teacher 3: And Cathy, the reason you were able to guide them through that inquiry is because you know the standards, you know the content they need to know, you know the process they need to be going through.

SOUND ON TAPE: Students solving math problem. Student 1: Let's check our work. Student 2: How are we going to check our work? Student 1: Let's do 13 times 4. Student 2: Yeah!

Ursula Annio: we don't test prep, we don't have any Saturday academies, we don't have anything of that nature. We believe and our philosophy is that everything that we do every single day leading up to the test is going to prepare them for that day. Our children are meeting and exceeding the standards. However, intrinsically it's more important that they maintain that long-term learning. And that's what our authentic curriculum really supplies them, that long-term learning.