



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Ron Brown Academy

Middle School 57

**125 Stuyvesant Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11221**

Principal: Celeste Douglas

Dates of review: April 20 - 23, 2007

Reviewer: Rodney Braithwaite

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 New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Ron Brown Academy is a neighborhood school with 340 students from grade 6 through grade 8, which shares the building with another middle school. The number of students enrolled varies by a significant number, 85 fewer this year than last, because of a high rate of student mobility. Sixteen percent are special education students, which is a higher proportion than City or similar schools. Eight percent of students are English language learners, below the average of City and similar schools. Eighty percent of the students are Black, 18% Hispanic and the remainder Asian or other ethnic groups. Eighty one percent of students are qualified for Title 1 funding, higher than City and similar schools. The most recent immigrants have been from the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. Student attendance is at present between 89 and 90%, a little below that of City and similar schools. A new principal was appointed to the school in September 2006.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The new principal leads by example, is generating high expectation and pride in the school, and has made a significant difference to the life of the school.
- The school administration, guided by the principal, has developed a good understanding of the creation and use of student data to improve achievement.
- Teachers, supported strongly by the administration, collaborate effectively in teams, and are determined to further improve their instruction.
- Relationships in the school are good, and morale is improving.
- Students are positive in their attitudes to learning, enjoy coming to school, and have improved their attendance record.
- The school is becoming more effective at identifying the personal and academic needs of all students, and using this information in their planning.
- Those parents closely involved in the life of the school, have very high regard for the principal and all staff.
- The school's cabinet and principal are very accurate in their evaluation of the school's performance, and in analyzing the instructional skills of all teachers.
- All teachers are held accountable for raising achievement, which students are expected to share.
- The school has developed good partnerships with educational support groups, community based organizations and local high schools.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve and accelerate achievement of all groups and in English language arts.
- Ensure that through planned professional development, all teachers have greater understanding of and higher skills in their differentiated instruction.
- Follow through the detailed and long term school goals for improvement in student achievement, so that targets are met or exceeded.
- Find the resources to offer wider extracurricular opportunities for students.
- Develop technology resources and student skills so that technology becomes fully integrated across the whole curriculum.
- Make further efforts to encourage more parents to take an active part in the education of their children.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The new principal's own commitment to students, staff and parents, and the whole school community has inspired higher expectations of what the school can achieve. Teachers work collaboratively and show an ever increasing willingness to improve their instructional skills through well focused professional development. Students like their teachers, feel that they are well cared for, and are enjoying the fresh challenges in their learning. The faculty is following very positively the guidance of the principal and her equally motivated cabinet and has reached a proficient level in its current creation and use of data to improve student achievement. The progress of all students is being very closely monitored, and they as well as their teachers are constantly being encouraged to be accountable for their learning. Parents are very pleased with the changes in the school. However still too few of them are prepared to support the Parent Teacher's Association.

The administration is now continuously evaluating school plans, student achievement and instruction. Its evaluations are accurate and honest, so it knows that there is still much to be done. This includes raising achievement, especially in English language arts. Improvements in provision for technology and extracurricular activities have also been identified. Realistic action plans, both medium and long term are now in place, and are reviewed regularly. These, combined with good teamwork and collaboration, and excellent leadership, leave the school well placed to make even more rapid improvement

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.

In the last six months, since her appointment, the principal has set a remarkable pace in guiding the development of a considerable bank of information about the achievement of all students. Teachers have been encouraged and guided by the administration to use not only data about State and City tests but to develop and use regularly the school's own assessments. Student tracking spreadsheets are now used throughout the school, and teachers are now required to report reading progress on a regular weekly basis or sometimes at a moment's notice. The school uses its data to give a constant update on the progress of all students, in addition to providing information about personal needs, care issues, behavior and attendance.

Data is used to identify the learning and progress of all groups of students in the school, including special education students and English language learners. As a result rigorous action plans for improving achievement in English language arts have been created for identified target groups. These include Hispanic students, students at level 1, and students who are at level 2 who could reach level 3. The school has also identified that boys need more focused learning opportunities which correspond with their particular needs, in order to improve their progress. The school has recognized that its own

performance has for several years indicated low and inconsistent achievement in all grades, and now has in place many indicators of increasing progress as a result of better interpretation and use of data. The school is confident that the achievement in this year's tests will show good improvement, because its own data is telling it so. Classes showing insufficient progress are immediately targeted by coaches for further support. The school attempts to examine a number of criteria when comparing itself to other schools. These include teacher experience and mobility, parental involvement, numbers of students achieving level 1 and number of student suspensions. This gives it a broader picture than the present data indicates.

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 proficient.

The school has an effective new leadership team which is very collaborative. An example of this is the way in which the team analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the instruction skills of individual teachers. This leads to an action plan for professional development, in which the four leaders have an equal voice. Teachers in each grade have common planning meetings weekly, in order to plan and set goals for achievement in English language arts and mathematics, which are the main focus areas for the school at present. The school identifies students most in need of improvement such as boys, Hispanic students and students at level 1. The expectations of teachers, previously at a low level, have been raised, and continue to rise. This is because teachers have more data about their students, and are improving their skills in what the data is telling them. This is leading to better planning for individual needs. The challenge to the school is to maintain this improvement so that goals are reached in the indicated timescales.

The administration is rigorous in its determination that the whole school community is aware of the goals being set for improvement. Many opportunities are given to parents to learn about, and help the learning of their children. Some take advantage of the workshop training offered regularly by the school, and find teachers very informative and approachable. They also like the help and encouragement they receive from the new parent coordinator. Some parents though, are resistant to offers of assistance by the school in order to help meet the needs of their children, most often when the school advises on aspects of discipline or behavior. The leadership is aware that further strategies are needed to ensure widespread parent support.

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 proficient.

The recent improvements in the gathering and use of data in the school have helped the staff to become far more aware of how to plan for the mandated curriculum. Teachers now use their own records, assessments and conference information in order to align their planning to the school's stated goals, plans and expectations. An intense concentration on the mandated curriculum has, though, led to narrowness in the broader curriculum. As a result the development of student skills in technology and in resources is lagging behind

the school's expectations. The school also recognizes that there is a need to broaden the opportunities it offers to students in extracurricular learning.

The administration is constantly vigilant in ensuring that teachers are accountable for the improved learning of their students. Reading records for example are examined by the leadership every month, but can be called in for scrutiny by the principal at a moment's notice. Teachers also know that they are expected to improve instruction skills through professional development and cabinet support, with the most frequent guidance being 'turn it up a notch'. This applies especially to their skills in differentiated instruction, which is the focus for very intensive development later this term for the whole staff. The school uses its data effectively to plan timetables and learning schedules which are for the benefit of the needs of every student.

The principal is using the budget very skilfully to meet the priorities identified in its planning. Significant amounts of the budget have been directed to using the Teacher's College for staff training, to increasing hugely the school's stock of reading books, and to employ a new school intervention teacher for the benefit of students most in need. Students are very well engaged in their learning, saying, 'it is a sanctuary', and 'it's the reason I wake up in the morning'. They have great respect for their teachers, and all have an adult in school that they can trust. Nearly all attend school regularly. The school's attendance record, 92%, is slightly below the City average, but robust systems are in place for improvement, including the targeting of the thirty students with the worst attendance records.

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 proficient.

The principal and leadership promote very high expectations for the selection of staff in the school. Criteria used in their judgments include observation of prospective teachers' instruction skills, teacher's ability to build positive relationships, and their skills at producing and using student data effectively. This includes the skills of comparing student performance and identifying their learning needs in planning. Professional development is planned around the focused goals of the school. The principal for example, is shortly taking ten teachers to Utah for an intensive 5 day training course on the development of differentiated instruction. This knowledge will then be used by these teachers in collaborative professional development with the rest of the staff. The collaboration between staff includes regular classroom intervisitations and peer evaluations and lesson modeling by all four leaders.

The principal drives the shared goal of improving instruction and achievement. She is in classrooms constantly in a non-threatening manner to teachers. She is highly respected for her very accurate analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of instruction, and for her ability to define the needs of teachers to improve. She is an excellent role model for teachers because of her own widely recognized instruction skills. She is very well supported in evaluation of learning, achievement and planning by a lively cabinet and team leaders throughout the school. This has led to much sharper exchange of information and openness in team and individual evaluations. Teachers regularly visit each others classrooms, and do all they can to help each other to improve their teaching skills. This is indicative of the smooth running of the school, staff and student understanding of day-to-day procedures and good collaboration.

The school makes good use of all available youth and support services based upon the identified social and academic needs of all students. This includes the provision of a social worker for every grade to increase counseling opportunities, and a planned advisory provision next term for students in the 6th grade.

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.

The school's comprehensive education plan has been very well adapted by the leadership to identified needs. Originally an unwieldy and far too lengthy document, it has been slimmed down to identify very closely the schools' priorities in planning, assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of its progress. The school as a result now has continuously updated information on the progress of goals such as improving the achievement of level 1 students, the progress of students in reading a minimum of 30 books each year, and their progress in being able to read independently for 45 minutes daily. Recent data is showing that many students have as a result increased their reading stamina from 10 to 30 minutes. As the school gathers information on a regularly timed basis it is able to make rapid adjustments to its strategies if they are not working well enough. In mathematics for example, internal assessments were not working effectively so changes were quickly made to existing plans. The leadership has also established a structure, understood by all, that holds teachers accountable on a daily, weekly and monthly basis, for setting goals, adopting flexible realignment in planning, and improving student outcomes. This has been a major move, requiring much adjustment in teacher's thinking. The signs are that most teachers are welcoming this fresh approach positively, and have already successfully adopted new practices in monitoring and revising their plans. This indicates that the school has good capacity to continue improving.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Ron Brown Academy (MS 57)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

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	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

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	