



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Rachel Jean Mitchell School

Public School/Intermediate School 137

**121 Saratoga Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11233**

Principal: Ms. Loria A. Tucker

Dates of review: April 20 – 23, 2007

Reviewer: Eileen Hill

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Rachel Jean Mitchell is a pre-kindergarten through grade 7 elementary school, in the process of transitioning to a pre-kindergarten through grade 8 school. There are 471 students enrolled. Of these, 47 are special education students and 17 are English language learners. The school is Title 1 eligible for almost 100% of its students. This figure is higher than for similar schools. Eighty-two percent of the students are Black and 16% Hispanic. Attendance is below that of similar schools. The number of principal suspensions is higher than for similar schools. Staff absence is higher than that for similar schools. The school is housed in two buildings. The main building takes students in grade 2 through 7 and the annex building, a 15 minute walk away, takes pre-kindergarten through grade 1 students and also the self-contained special education classes for grades 1 through 3. The school houses a Robin Hood library with 10,000 books, which is open to parents. The school has a United Federation of Teachers center on site which provides professional support to teachers. The principal has been in post for four years. Staffing is generally stable.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school uses a satisfactory range of data and other assessment information to track and monitor the progress of most students.
- The school generally uses data well to monitor those students of particular interest to it, such as English language learners and those performing below grade level.
- Interventions and extended day classes are used appropriately to support the progress of underperforming students.
- The Core Knowledge program is well received by teachers and makes a valuable contribution to instruction and learning.
- Students are offered a broad curriculum to include classes in music, ballet and art.
- The main school has a good range of resources.
- Professional development is generally aligned satisfactorily to whole school priorities.
- Youth services are aligned well to the needs and interests of the students.
- Seventh grade students have been carefully assimilated in to the school.
- The assistant principals help the school to run smoothly on a day to day basis.

What the school needs to improve

- Involve teachers and parents more directly in planning and setting whole school goals and priorities.
- Hold teachers more accountable for the quality of instruction and for improving the performance of students.
- Improve the attendance of teachers and students.
- Provide better instruction and support for special education students.
- Ensure the principal commands the full respect of the staff and parents.
- Improve the school's capacity to revise and realign its practices swiftly and flexibly.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school.

The school is an orderly community. Students are well behaved and polite. Teachers are generally hard working. Good quality displays of students' work decorate walls and corridors to celebrate achievement and effort. Resources are good, especially in the main school. A newly refurbished science laboratory has just been completed. There is a large computer suite and a Robin Hood library with 10,000 books. New initiatives, such as the introduction of the Core Knowledge program, enhance instruction and a satisfactory range of data is collected and used to support and guide the progress of students, particularly those below grade level.

The principal is caring to both students and staff. She is knowledgeable about education and has a clear vision for the school. However, her communication and leadership skills are not well developed. Teachers lack clear direction and their morale is low; a significant proportion undermine the authority of the principal and some fail to follow her instructions. Other teachers are unhappy and poorly motivated by this situation. Teachers' attendance is erratic and has an impact on the attendance of the students. School leaders have not dealt well with this situation. The principal is unwilling to take decisive action with teachers who are not performing well in the classroom, even when they have an adverse effect on the progress of students.

Other aspects of the work of the school are not managed well, such as the arrangements for meeting the needs of special education students. The school does not plan and revise its goals collaboratively or with sufficient rigor or clarity. Parents, like teachers, are frustrated by poor communication and the failure of the principal to act decisively.

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 collects a range of data to monitor the progress of the students, particularly in English language arts. Data is generated from Princeton Review assessments, New York State assessments, the Everyday Mathematics assessment units, the Wilson reading program and from assessments teachers make on students on a daily or weekly basis. The data helps the school to understand students' progress, particularly those in the testing grades. The school uses data well to understand the performance of its small number of English language learners. It understands the progress of its special education students but these students make less progress than others, especially those in self-contained classes. Leaders are aware that the performance of boys is below that of girls, but have not yet acted on this information. The school does not look closely at the differences in performance between its ethnic groups. Data is used well to identify those students in need of interventions and to determine which students should attend extended day or Saturday classes. Interventions are successful in raising students' performance from level one to level two and from level two to level three. The school compares itself

with similar schools and against its own past performance. It is doing well in mathematics, but English language arts is not as strong as it was several years ago. Much of the school's resources are now focused on improving English language arts levels.

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 Comprehensive Education Plan contains detailed goals. There are no interim timeframes for monitoring the progress of plans, although this and other planning establish measurable goals by which to assess progress at the end of the year. Once written, the Comprehensive Education Plan is not referred to regularly by school leaders. Nevertheless, appropriate priorities have been established and the school generally works towards achieving them. Plans focus largely on underperforming students and insufficient attention is given in planning to high performing students or to other subgroups, such as boys or the different ethnic groups.

The school conveys satisfactory expectations to students, but goals and plans are not shared with parents, beyond those on the school leadership team and the comparatively small number who attend the parent teacher association. Parents are committed to the well-being and achievement of their children and would welcome greater involvement in the school. Communications with parents are not well established and, while school priorities drive the activity of leaders and to a lesser extent, teachers, the plans for improving students' progress and performance are not shared sufficiently with the school community to create a unified vision of what the school is aiming to do and how it intends to achieve it.

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 undeveloped.

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum for the majority of its students. Core knowledge materials align the curriculum closely to the mandated curriculum and generate meaningful data about progress. Instruction in art is good, as evidenced by the high quality art work displayed around the school. Some students have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument and others to take ballet lessons. School concerts are performed twice a year. Special education students in self-contained classes in grades 2 through 3 do not receive the same curriculum experiences as other students. Since they are taught in the annex they do not have ready access to the school library, computer room and new science laboratory. They have few opportunities to mix with their peers in general education classes. Teachers are not sufficiently accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. Although the principal is aware of which teachers are weak, she does not take decisive action to bring about improvements. Teachers do not have sufficient access to data held on individual students and do not, as a rule, differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of the different groups within classes.

While most staff know and respect the students, staffing and scheduling decisions are not always driven by students' needs. The principal sometimes allocates weak teachers to vulnerable groups of students. Budgeting decisions result in good quality resources for students, such as the newly refurbished science laboratory and the computer suites. Students are usually engaged by instructional programs, especially when they are given opportunities for active participation. Apart from those learning musical instruments, students are not engaged by music instruction because it is not practical. Student attendance is a priority for the school and it is monitored on a daily basis with phone calls to parents and home visits. Students are most often absent on Mondays and Fridays. Teachers too are also most often absent on Mondays and Fridays, with student absence mirroring staff absence. This situation is not managed effectively by school leaders.

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 undeveloped.

Most teachers and other staff are hard working, show a commitment to using data to monitor the progress of individual students and have generally sound expectations of students' progress. Teachers do not use data to compare their own progress and the outcomes of their students within and across classrooms. Professional development focuses on the school's priorities, particularly for improving literacy and for developing pedagogical skills. The English and mathematics coaches work productively with teachers on improving instruction. All grades have common planning time, but most teachers are resistant to attending planning meetings and the principal has not been sufficiently clear about what she expects. The principal and assistant principals make the required formal observations of teachers and use the information gained to decide on professional development. However, plans for improving the quality of teachers' instruction are not consistently implemented. Informal observations are also made, but teachers sometimes receive inadequate feedback from these.

The principal does not command the respect of a significant proportion of the teachers and parents and this, combined with her reluctance to make decisions, limits her capacity to effect change. She does not communicate her expectations clearly, explicitly or decisively. She is not sufficiently visible around the school and rarely attends meetings. Staff and parents are frustrated by the lack of leadership and direction. The assistant principals ensure the two school sites run smoothly on a day to day basis, but they are not in a position to take forward issues that are the responsibility of the principal.

The school aligns youth development and support services effectively around its academic goals for individual students, grades and groups. It uses partnerships with community based organizations to increase funding and resources and to enhance the curriculum.

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 undeveloped.

Since the Comprehensive Education Plan is not a living document, reviews of whole school planning do not take place routinely and developments, such as the refurbishment of the science laboratory, are not included in whole school planning. Most reviews relate to the progress of individual students, for example, the progress they make as measured by the Princeton Review outcomes. There has not been a sufficiently clear review of all assessment data for the principal to be confident that the school will meet the 12% target for increased English language arts performance this year. Planning for important areas of the work of the school is sometimes undertaken and then not implemented. For example, the school drew up a plan to transition the special education students from the annex to the main school in September 2006, but this has not been acted upon with the result that special education students remain in an inappropriate setting.

The principal uses data to make comparisons between the progress of students within and across classrooms, but she does not act on this evidence, even when there are compelling reasons for doing so. Where instruction is particularly weak and all data and other evidence demonstrate that this is having an adverse effect on the progress of students, the principal is reluctant to act. Similarly, teachers who need to make improvements in their instruction, for example, in planning and differentiation, are also not dealt with firmly and decisively, so they continue with their existing practices. The principal does not demonstrate sufficient clarity in planning and reviewing progress across the year and over the work of the whole school. Since communication and leadership are weak, the school is not sufficiently flexible and agile in aligning its practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Rachel Jean Mitchell (PS/IS 137)	∅	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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		