



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Isaac Remsen School

Public School 147

**325 Bushwick Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11206**

Principal: Rafaela Espinal-Pacheco

Dates of review: February 12 - 13, 2007

Reviewer: Peter Lewis

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Isaac Remsen Public School is an elementary school which provides an education for nearly 340 students from pre-kindergarten to 5th grade. The proportion of Hispanic students, while broadly in line with similar schools at 57%, is higher than the average in schools across the City. At just over 40%, the proportion of Black students is higher than both similar and City schools. There is a very small percentage of Asian and those students with other backgrounds. There are just over 20% of students who are registered as special education, with about half this number assessed as English language learners. Attendance has fluctuated over the past 3 years but is now broadly in line with that of similar and City schools as a result of the emphasis that the school has put into promoting both attendance and students' enthusiasm. Staff attendance has improved significantly since the principal's appointment. The school is consistently eligible for Title 1 funding.

The school is the only elementary school in District 14 to have successfully applied to join the first year of the Empowerment Schools initiative. Empowerment Schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment Schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements. This school is currently engaged in a research project to design its own periodic assessment materials.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has brought a clear sense of purpose and high expectations to the school, which have rapidly secured a positive impact on students' attitudes and learning.
- The assistant principal, coaches, and senior staff fully share the principal's vision and have been key players in its continuing translation into daily practice throughout the school.
- Rapid improvements to the fabric of the building have ensured that classrooms and hallways now celebrate student achievement and reflect a real climate for learning.
- Student assessment information is used exceptionally well by leaders in identifying students' needs, and in supporting teachers in planning work that supports learning in a focused way.
- The school is very well organized and this ensures that procedures and very high expectations are well supported through daily routines.
- Teamwork and openness are very strong features of the school, which have helped it to secure such improvement over a short period of time.
- Students' learning has improved rapidly because of improvements that have been secured in teaching, the curriculum and daily organization.
- Students are fully engaged in their learning and enjoy having a great deal expected of them.
- The school has placed great emphasis on involving its parents, which is reflected in the degree to which they celebrate the improvements made for their children and their pride in being part of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Build upon the good use that is made of assessment information in planning future learning in reading, writing and mathematics through all other subjects.
- Agree the key, achievable priorities for whole school development each year and share these, and the progress made towards their achievement with teachers, parents and students so that all are fully involved.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The Isaac Remsen School has established well developed and wide-ranging systems to evaluate its performance and to plan actions that have been successful in securing improvement. It makes very good use of data to help it understand where students are learning well and what needs to be done to accelerate this further.

Students are, overall, taught well through a curriculum that is well planned, carefully structured and considerably enriched, for example, by the very good range of extra support that is planned for students who are 'at risk' of failing to achieve at the expected rate. Staff, particularly those who are new or who are in senior positions, demonstrate a strong commitment to the school. They reflect the clarity of vision that has been so well established by the principal. Because of this, much of the school's work is characterized by a strong sense of 'expecting the best' of teachers and students. This attitude is, in turn, reflected in students' very positive attitudes to their learning and the confidence and enthusiasm with which they talk about their work and their school. Parents are very pleased with the degree to which the school has changed and by the way in which the school helps them to understand their children's learning.

Good use has been made of the opportunities presented by becoming an empowered school. The principal has made sure that data is well used in planning students' learning, and that the systems of assessment that have been developed by the school in collaboration with an outside agency are informative and effective. Because of the rapid improvements that have already been made, not least in the fabric and appearance of the building, and the quality of the school's planning and evaluation, it is very well placed to continue to develop further.

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 well developed.

Over a short period of time since the principal's appointment, the school has gathered a good range of data. It has made good use of formative and summative assessments of student achievement and progress, focusing particularly on reading, writing and mathematics. Good use is made of externally generated information to enable the school to understand how well its students are doing in comparison with other schools, while the disaggregation of the full range of student information enables accurate comparisons to be made for different groups of students across subjects and grades. For example, patterns of student achievement between different groups of students are followed closely so that the school not only tracks the achievement of its lowest attaining students; it also analyzes the progress made by those with higher achievement. These processes have been considerably refined since the school was enabled to take on empowerment status. Periodic and interim assessments have been introduced, the results of which are well

understood by school leaders. Through rapidly developing skills of conferencing with students, teachers develop their understanding of small steps in students learning, as well as being able to analyze the impact that features such as behaviour or attendance make to students' learning. This has allowed the school to establish a refined picture of student progress and what can be done to secure further improvement through each class and grade. While the school recognizes that teachers' skills in undertaking the analysis of data needs to be further developed, the accuracy with which senior staff interpret the implications of student assessment information provides excellent guidance for teachers. Careful and accurate interpretations are made of the information that the school gathers, which are shared well with teachers and used well to inform, for example, grade level conferences. As a result of this comprehensive use of data, the school is right in its evaluation that, "We know our students, and we know where they're going."

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 principal and other instructional leaders work very well in collaboration with teachers in evaluating the school's work and in planning for improvement, so that all are increasingly involved in identifying both successes and areas for further improvement. Collaboration through the school's network and with external consultants has been effective in refining strategies of evaluation. Meetings in which senior staff look at the implications of data to disseminate to teachers, set very high expectations of student achievement, which are reflected in the goals that are set. There is a high degree of consistency between academic and organizational goals through the Comprehensive Education Plan and the principal's own goals for school improvement. These drive the activity of senior staff, although the understanding of precisely what the school is doing to improve is less consistent among staff, parents and students. A wide range of assessment information has now been established and is used well in, for example, establishing projections for student achievement. As a result, goals are set which identify development needs across classes and subjects. The use of rubrics, developed by the school, to identify what different stages of writing look like from kindergarten to 5th grade helps leaders and teachers in establishing targets for students, and reflects the strategies that are well used to support target setting in reading and mathematics. The school has moved rapidly towards achieving consistency in setting challenging targets for its higher attaining students, and has achieved success in this in reading and, to a lesser extent, in mathematics.

Special education students and English language learners are well supported through plans which focus on their needs. However, the school continues to work to improve teachers' skills in differentiation, particularly as it impacts on the work planned for students with special needs. Expectations are high and teaching and individual education plans identify the small steps needed to ensure progress. Regular meetings involving teachers and support staff are useful in helping parents to support their children's learning at home. Parents value the high quality range of information that they receive about the progress their children are making.

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.

In moving from a culture in which much of its instruction was subsumed into test preparation, the school has made very good use of data to demonstrate to teachers that a focus on learning has the potential to achieve increased levels of success for all groups of students. Considerable success has been achieved in firmly establishing the guided reading and workshop models of instruction in grades K to 2, and this has begun to have a positive impact upon practice in the upper grades in the school. The curricula for English language arts and mathematics are well developed and are supported by the good use of assessment information to identify where adaptations or additions are necessary. Curriculum maps effectively guide the sequence of planning, most recently developed in social studies and science. The school recognizes the need to extend planning and differentiation so that stronger links are established between these subjects and reading, writing and mathematics. Although the school is still working to ensure that all teachers differentiate their instruction fully, the use of assessment information by senior staff has established a strong sense of accountability among staff. Relationships are strong and students report that adults in the school have their best interests at heart, particularly should difficulties arise.

Staff deployment and the schedule for instruction are considered in the light of what will help students the most. Good budget management in, for example, keeping class sizes small to help in the development of differentiated planning and the provision of additional teachers to support collaboration and academic intervention, has a positive impact on student learning. In a similar way, the considerable investment in books that are targeted at different interest levels not only helps teachers in developing their understanding of the use of different genres of text, it also has had a very positive impact on students’ engagement and interest, which are high. A strong and successful emphasis has been placed on ensuring high rates of student attendance. This is supported by good relationships between students and teachers which are reflected in their very positive attitudes to their learning.

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.

The high expectations that are set by the principal are reflected in her accurate understanding of the quality of teaching across the school. She has made very good use of this, not only in ensuring that the most successful staff are placed in key teaching positions, but in building a very strong and committed leadership team. She is respected by staff, students and parents for the vision that she has brought to the school as well as for the clear organizational strategies that she has established. As a result, a high level of commitment and a clear sense of purpose are apparent throughout the school. Many opportunities are created for staff to plan together and to discuss the impact of their work on students’ attainment. The deployment of senior staff into grade meetings is a good example of this as it promotes teamwork that is strongly connected to well-focused monitoring of instruction and analysis of student work and data. In a similar way, good use is made of the expertise of outside agencies in ensuring that goals are achieved.

The school places a high priority on the alignment between professional development of staff and the identified priorities for its own development. Good practice is accurately identified through a very good range of formal and informal strategies and systems are established to enable this practice to be disseminated. Staff development is strengthened by carefully planned strategies of monitoring, support, and guidance, and by peer observation. A strong data focus has been established whereby members of the professional development team make use of analyses of student achievement to identify and modify training and support opportunities. These activities enable school leaders to identify strengths in teaching and in the curriculum, as well as to reinforce the analysis of data to evaluate programs and plan for improvement.

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 principal and other leaders have a very good understanding of the levels achieved by students across the school, within and across grades. This information has been used effectively to develop the curriculum and instruction to match more closely the needs of individuals. The rapid development of assessment information, and of the curriculum have been important features in helping the school to refine its understanding of rates of expected progress, particularly in reading and writing. Assessment information is used well in identifying aspects of learning that are effective and areas in which improvement is required.

Good use is made of monitoring and a range of discussions to understand the progress that students and the school as a whole have made towards established goals. Regular meetings have been established to review the impact of planned actions which, increasingly, are helping the school modify its strategies where necessary. The priorities identified in the Comprehensive Education Plan are widely understood and leaders make good use of these to ensure that developments reflect the need for improvements in student achievement. The school is, however, hampered by the number of goals that it is required to identify. While the principal's personal goals more accurately reflect priorities that the school identifies and focuses most closely upon, the school is aware that more could be done to communicate these across to the staff as a whole. Data is used well to maintain an understanding of the comparative performance of students in different groups and classes. This enables the school to focus resources and support where they will be most effective. That these strategies are having a positive impact is seen in the steady increase in student achievement, particularly in the younger grades, and in the increasing confidence with which teachers are planning instruction in line with a range of student needs.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Isaac Remsen School (PS 147)	∅	✓	+
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	