



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

River East Elementary School

Public School 037

**508 East 120 Street
New York
NY 10035**

Principal: Alison McKenzie

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Reviewer: Martyn Groucutt

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

River East began as a progressive alternative to traditional public schooling, only becoming a school in its own right two years ago. At that time, while remaining true to its ideals of liberal, progressive education and a curriculum that included music making and art for all students, its academic performance was far below the standard expected in the City. A new principal, who had herself been a teacher at River East for ten years and who was therefore able to appreciate the strengths in the vision that had founded the program, was employed in order to bring about reform and introduce academic rigor without losing the commitment to liberal education and to a collaborative partnership between teachers, parents and students. Over the last two years, the school has made great strides to provide an effective education in the core curriculum, supplementing English language arts, mathematics and social studies with a new specialist science laboratory which is used by all students right through from kindergarten. The school is based in new premises which are light and airy and where classrooms are real learning environments. The result is a school true to many of its founding ideals, but which is also providing a rapidly improving academic program.

It is now a kindergarten through 5th grade elementary school with 147 students enrolled, of whom 55.47% are Black, 41.77% are Hispanic, 1.36% are White and 0.68% are American Indian. It is in receipt of Title 1 funding. Around 20% are special education students and 3% are English language learners. Attendance over this academic year is running at an average of 91.1% which is very close to the average for the City.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well.

- The vision and leadership of the principal, now joined by her effective assistant principal, is transforming what had been a failing school.
- The entire staff of the school share a vision in which academic rigor sits alongside a commitment to equity and social justice.
- The curriculum has a breadth that enriches the lives of students, such as the ability to play music and create art.
- There is an engagement with parents that creates a powerful collaborative relationship based on partnership.
- The use of a range of external groups and organizations underpins the curriculum and supports the professional development of teachers.
- The process of professional development interviews between the principal and teachers supports the setting of individual goals and targeted professional support to promote effective teaching.
- The process of early, targeted intervention, such as the reading recovery program, supports students in maximizing their potential.
- The collection of data on the performance of students throughout the year supports teachers in meeting individual student needs.
- The creation of common planning time is enabling teachers to engage in activities, such as the development of rubrics, which are helping drive up academic standards.
- The original vision that set up the school is still maintained alongside the newly imposed academic rigor.

What the school needs to improve.

- Continue to refine the process of data collection and support for teachers to maximize their ability to meet individual student need.
- There should be continuing development of strategies aimed at improving standards and outcomes in mathematics.
- The school should look to provide a way to enable the intervention teachers to join classroom teachers in common planning meetings.
- Further development of curriculum mapping to cover the whole curriculum and strengthen the role of literacy and numeracy across all areas.
- The use of data should be further refined to look at the performance of groups of students as well as individuals.
- Develop the use of technology as a tool for teaching and learning across the whole curriculum.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Data is now being used to track the performance of students in English language arts and mathematics on a regular basis throughout the year. This is supporting the teachers in knowing the strengths and needs of every student and the progress they are making. They are starting to show good flexibility in the ways in which individual needs are met. Over the last two years there has been an understandable concentration on the need to improve achievement in literacy, but the focus is now shifting to mathematics, where the performance of students is lagging behind. Results are improving in the core curriculum and within the wider vision of the school, with commitment to liberal arts. Progress and achievement in music and art remain high.

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 is now using a range of data, both formal and informal, which is enabling it to gain a clear picture of what each student is achieving and the progress made during the year. Fountas and Pinnell reading levels and end of unit mathematics assessments are logged carefully so that class teachers can see at a glance the performance of each of their students in reading and mathematics. The administration is looking at ways in which it can generate school based data, and how graphical representation can create a clear picture of individual levels of achievement. However, this process is comparatively new and the school started from a very low base. Systems are still developing and teachers are at different stages in their ability to maximize the use of data. Good practice is illustrated in the development of effective running records, conference notes and portfolios of students' work, which are used to demonstrate progress over time and provide solid evidence of individual student achievement.

A major strength is the early identification of students who need additional support, and a reading recovery program in first grade is effective in supporting those who need additional help at the earliest possible opportunity. However, there is a need for further development of data analysis when it comes to looking at the performance of groups of students, such as ethnic groups, English language learners and others. Similarly, while the school does look at its performance against that of other schools in the district, it could refine its analysis of its own students across classrooms, grade levels and subjects. Where this is starting to happen it is supporting rising improvement in the school, but the school's self evaluation accepts a need for greater consistency of practice.

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.

Staff collaborate effectively in supporting rising improvement. This is being achieved without losing sight of the founding ideals of progressive education. The previously missing academic rigor of using data and setting clear targets for immediate and long term improvement is in place across the school. Data provides evidence of progress at a whole school, as well as individual level. It shows the school its areas of success, such as in the gains made in English language arts, and where it needs to redouble its efforts, such as in mathematics, where interim results of 4th grade scores showed a decrease in achievement.

All staff demonstrate a real commitment to the school, and work together well. This is illustrated in the effective use of common planning time for a range of professional activity, such as the development of a skills-mapping chart in kindergarten to enable close monitoring of individuals over the year. The two intervention teachers work effectively in supporting students identified as needing additional help, though at the moment they are not able to meet with teachers during common planning time. While a start has made on curriculum mapping of English language arts and mathematics, this is not yet being done across the wider curriculum and there remains scope for looking at ways in which literacy and numeracy can be developed across all areas.

Parents are fully involved in the whole life of the school and information is shared on a regular basis. The parents are very appreciative of the level of contact and the open door policy of all staff. This means that goals and plans can be owned by the whole school community. Parents are appreciative of the raised academic expectations brought in by the current administration and students are aware of the higher expectations for their academic outcomes.

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 curriculum is not only aligned to meet the needs of students in core areas, including the recent development of specialist science facilities which are used by all students, it also allows the school to remain true to its founding vision. This means that students are taught violin by a professional musician and art for all is led by a specialist. Students therefore benefit from a wider curriculum than exists in many elementary schools. In a small school such as this, the use of teacher and student time is well guided by the needs of students, and groups of students, that emerge over time.

Teachers use their common planning time to work together effectively. They are improving their ability to use data, though some are more comfortable with it than others. Individual data is supporting the development of differentiated instruction and class teachers are well supported by the intervention teachers who use both push-in and pull-out techniques to enhance learning. This supports the individualization of instruction, allowing students to reach their potential more effectively. The reading recovery program is one example of

using funding to meet identified need. The scheme is costly, but ultimately effective, as is seen in the reading scores of participating students. The employment of the intervention teachers is a good illustration of staffing decisions being driven by identified needs. However, at the moment the use of technology as a tool for teaching and learning is not well enough developed.

A significant investment has gone into staff support, the improvement of pedagogy and classroom management and that is leading to rising academic performance from a very low base. Students are fully involved in learning and examples of their work are on display throughout the school. There is a mutual respect between teachers and students. Attendance is at the city average and the school works very closely with parents to ensure that students attend school regularly.

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.

Two years ago the principal returned to the school where she had taught for ten years, with a mandate to bring about a transformation in the performance of the school. This she has tackled, ably supported by her assistant principal, already producing higher expectations and outcomes in a school that runs smoothly. There has been a large turnover of teaching staff and there is very good support, not only internally, but also through external help from organizations such as Hunter College and Collaborative Educational Innovations who provide mentors for individual teachers. Teachers have been supported in developing their expertise with data, so that progress and achievement are identified in ways that had not happened previously. Systems enable teachers to use data within and across classrooms to improve performance, though at the moment there is little comparison across groups. The school is well placed to see a continuing rise in student performance, while at the same time retaining the core commitment to progressive education and social justice and equity.

Data drives professional development. Teachers have an annual professional development discussion with the principal in which goals and development needs are identified. Faculty also supports their own identified needs through self and peer evaluations, and inter-visitation is a feature of school life at both formal and informal levels. The principal and her assistant undertake formal and informal observations in a positive and supportive way that enable teachers to reflect on their practice. Much professional development has focused on using data to maximize student performance. Teachers work together in a collaborative way, supporting each other and their students, so that students really value their relationships with staff, enabling them to give of their best. They also benefit from excellent links with youth development and support services, such as Opus 118, which provides the professional violinist who works with the students, producing very good results.

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 Comprehensive Education Plan, which is produced through a process of genuine collaboration between administration, faculty and parents in the school leadership team, provides an effective way of identifying priorities and focus for the school. As the year goes on, student progress is measured regularly and consistently in both reading and mathematics and the school is developing its ability to use this information effectively. While it remains a work in progress, the more effective use of data is allowing the school to show flexibility in the way it responds to identified student need over time and to realign practices and resources to meet changing circumstances.

Progress of students within and across classrooms provides a focus for teachers, who work together well and develop effective collaborative practice. The small size of classes allows for considerable flexibility. For example, in the first grade, teachers are collaborating to create flexible groupings of students who read at similar levels from both classes, so that they can work together and be supported by their teachers, who address their specific needs. There are, therefore, examples of planning and interventions being used effectively, both across the whole school and also at grade and class level. Progress is measured carefully, good practice now being in place from kindergarten through 5th grade, and teachers have a clear picture of the progress being made by each of their students. This feature is currently stronger than the use being made of the data to monitor the progress of different groups, such as in comparing the outcomes of boys and girls. Professional development is supporting more effective use of data so there is an increasing sophistication in the way that planning, based on meeting identified needs of groups and individuals, is utilized throughout the year.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: River East Elementary School (PS 037)	∅	✓	+
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	