



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Russell Sage School**

**Junior High School 190**

**68 - 17 Austin Street  
Queens  
N Y 11375**

**Principal: Marilyn Grant**

**Dates of review: November 28 - 29, 2006**

**Reviewer: Chip Morrison**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Russell Sage School is a large junior high school serving a diverse population of approximately 1,050 students in grades 7 through 9. The school population consists 34% White, 33% Asians, 22% Hispanic and 11% Black. Six percent are special education students and 9% are English language learners. Thirty-two percent of the students are Title 1 eligible compared to the City average of 74%. Average attendance is 95% which is higher than that for similar schools.

The school has many new teachers including 35% who have been at the school for less than three years and 50% have been in the profession for less than six years. Approximately 80% of the teachers have a masters degree or higher. The leadership team consists of the principal, three assistant principals, a literacy coach and a mathematics coach.

About half the students go on to attend Forest Hills High School while another 25% leave after the 8th grade to attend specialized high schools such as Peter Stuyvesant, Bronx Science and Brooklyn Technical High Schools.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- More than a quarter of the 8th grade students are accepted into specialized high schools as a result of the school's enrichment programs.
- The principal has a background in professional development and leads an experienced instructional leadership team that works well together.
- The school provides honors classes at each grade level, and with encouragement from parents, makes a special effort to challenge advanced students.
- The school makes secure use of data from City and State assessments, as well as interim assessments in mathematics and English language arts, to identify student needs.
- The school's use of the America's Choice instructional model is leading to a degree of consistency in teaching and learning across grade levels and subject areas.
- Instructional leaders pay close attention to what is going on in classrooms, visiting most classrooms at least once each day.
- There is a strong emphasis on having students read for pleasure at their independent reading level.
- The school library is well-stocked and capably managed and each classroom also has its own library.
- Teachers do a good job communicating expectations to students through the use of scoring rubrics and clearly stated objectives at the beginning of each lesson.

### What the school needs to improve

- Explore ways of stimulating ongoing collegial discussions about instructional quality and lesson design among all teachers in the building.
- Formalize the collection of data on features of classroom instruction, so that it can profile prevailing instructional practices across grade levels, subject areas, and the school as a whole, and use this data as a basis for ongoing discussion of instructional quality.
- Look closely at existing grouping strategies to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve at the highest possible level.
- Engage the entire faculty in an ongoing process of setting specific, measurable, challenging and time-bound goals for improvement, and closely monitor progress towards these goals.
- Develop the consistent use of scoring rubrics as a way of collecting data on the quality of student writing across grade levels and subject areas.
- Explore creative ways of managing the daily schedule to provide improved support and opportunities for flexible grouping of students, faculty collaboration and in-house professional development.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

The current principal arrived at the school in 2004. The school takes pride in the academic performance of its students, using the growing number of students who gain admission to selective, specialized high schools as an indicator of academic success. Since her arrival, the principal has been changing the focus of instruction from teacher-directed to students taking more ownership of their learning, with support and guidance from the teacher. The impact of this work is evident in many classrooms although this is not consistent across the school. The principal continues to look carefully at issues of lesson design, grouping, assessment practices, teacher expectations, and other critical instructional factors.

### 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 makes secure use of existing student performance data to identify academic needs and to track progress over time. It does this for individual students, grade-level cohorts, and other relevant subgroups, including ethnic groups, English language learners and special education students. In addition to data from State and City testing programs, the school uses interim diagnostics, including the Princeton Review system for mathematics and English language arts, and the Diagnostic Reading Assessment for basic reading skills. Teachers also use informal assessments to identify the prior knowledge that the students bring with them to class. Data on academic performance is supplemented with information concerning students' broader development when identifying specific individual needs. The school is considering using the collaborative review and scoring of student work samples, using a consistent scoring rubric, as a means of providing additional information about student learning. This is also to ensure that by including both strengths and challenges, teachers develop a common set of high expectations for the quality of student work.

The school uses the number of students who gain admission to specialty high schools as a primary success indicator. However, it does not yet attempt to follow the academic progress of its graduates as they encounter the challenges of high school. The school is investigating the possibility of careful tracking of a sample of students, particularly those who go on to attend the local high school after completing the 9th grade at Russell Sage. Although instructional leaders do compare the school's academic performance against performance of comparable schools in the City, the benchmarking process is not as effective as it might be.

**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.**

Teachers and instructional leaders at Russell Sage have the general goal of increasing the number of students who meet or exceed State standards. There is also an emphasis on increasing the number of students who gain admission to the City’s specialized high-schools. Individual students who are identified as falling below standard are given special attention, with the intention of moving them up a level. Generally, students who are thought to be at risk of academic failure are given extra help during the school day, through academic intervention services, during the additional 37.5 minute period at the end of the day, in the after-school program and at a Saturday academy.

Teachers do a good job communicating expectations to students through the use of scoring rubrics and clearly stated objectives at the beginning of each lesson. However, the school does not yet make a regular practice of setting specific, measurable, interim goals for the academic performance of student groups by grade level and subject area as a collaborative group process. As a result, it is difficult to hold individuals and groups accountable for success, or to use specific, measurable goals to motivate the combined efforts of school community members.

Parents receive regular communications translated into their home languages. They have opportunities to attend parent-teacher conferences twice a year, during which the school’s expectations are conveyed. Parents speak highly of the school and feel they have a good understanding of what is expected of their children and how they can help them to learn effectively. The school provides honors classes at each grade level, and with encouragement from parents, makes a special effort to challenge advanced students. However, more could be done to strengthen communications between parents and individual classroom teachers.

**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.**

School leaders have been largely successful in ensuring basic coverage of the tested curriculum in a way that is consistent between each classroom. This is accomplished through the regular grade-level meetings in English language arts and mathematics that are conducted by the instructional coaches, with guidance from the assistant principals assigned to each subject area. Item analysis of data from interim assessments, such as the Princeton Review system, is used to identify areas for special instructional focus and also to target professional development activities. Subject-area assistant principals, coaches and teacher leaders meet regularly to discuss planning and assessments to drive instruction. The school’s enrichment programs support a good number of students being accepted into specialized high schools.

The school is in its third year of work with America’s Choice, an organization that supports a comprehensive approach to instructional quality, especially in English language arts and mathematics. The instructional model, which features a workshop approach, has been

implemented with some consistency in most classrooms. Further work remains to be done, however, to ensure that the school has the capacity to implement the model even more fully, thus increasing the likelihood that students in every classroom will experience high-quality instruction. For example, the amount of time that is available for any given lesson is too short to support fully the workshop approach to lesson design. Students are grouped homogeneously at the beginning of the year into leveled classes, including an honors class, and remain in the same groups throughout the year. There are instances of high-quality instruction throughout the building. However, data is not consistently well used to differentiate instruction sufficiently to guarantee that students are fully engaged at the appropriate level of skill and understanding.

Budgeting, staffing, and scheduling decisions are focused on improving student outcomes, especially for students who are most in need of improvement. The school's emphasis on independent reading for pleasure is particularly commendable although its impact is not monitored as closely as it might be. The school library is well-managed and serves as a comfortable place for students to come during free periods. Students make good use of this resource. The prevalence of classroom libraries provides further support for independent reading. Teachers are attentive to student needs. Attendance is not a serious issue in this school.

**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.**

Student performance data is used to some degree to identify areas of need and to deploy resources against those needs, including the selection of staff. For example, item analysis of interim assessments is used for planning of instruction as well as professional development. The work with America's Choice has clearly provided a useful framework and common language for discussing issues of instructional quality.

The principal leads an experienced instructional leadership team that works well together. The school runs smoothly on a day to day basis. Issues that do arise are dealt with quickly and effectively. Weekly leadership meetings and cabinet meetings are the venue for discussions around goals and areas of concern. Instructional leaders pay close attention to what is going on in classrooms, visiting most classrooms at least once each day. Much remains to be done to ensure that instructional leaders and teachers are working together, in a collaborative way, to continuously monitor and improve the quality of instruction on a schoolwide basis, for all students, in every classroom. The America's Choice classroom observation protocol and the frequent walkthroughs by instructional leaders is a good starting point. However, the process does not yet generate quantitative data on school-wide instructional practices that could be used to set goals, monitor progress and engage all faculty members in an ongoing, collaborative effort to continuously improve the quality of lessons.

There is potential for improvement in the provision of opportunities for teacher collaboration, in-house professional development and teacher participation in decisions that affect teaching and learning. The mathematics and English language arts departments are leading the way in terms of teacher collaboration and distributed instructional leadership because they have coaches assigned to them. Leadership capacity in other subject areas already exists but the organizational structures and processes that will allow this leadership to assert itself, particularly in science and social

studies, are not fully in place. Specialist teachers for art and music are insufficiently involved in the collaborative work of other faculty members.

The school has effective partnerships with numerous organizations which support the school's academic goals. These include the Queens Museum, the Hall of Science and the Bronx Zoo. Merrill Lynch has agreed to be a partner this year in the Principal for a Day Program. The principal is seeking to extend this cooperation to include internships for students who are not eligible for specialized high schools, 'big brother' programs for students who do not have strong parental or guardian figures at home and teambuilding among staff and administration.

**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.**

Weekly meetings of the leadership team provide frequent opportunities to discuss goals and progress towards them. Administrators and coaches meet with teachers on a regular basis to ensure that goals are shared and implemented. The school has begun to develop systems for monitoring student learning on a regular basis, primarily through the Princeton Review system and simulated English language arts tests. However, in the absence of specific interim goals for improvement, it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of strategies to boost performance of both teachers and students. Neither is it easy to focus discussion around the effectiveness of these strategies, and to redeploy resources or refine strategies based on feedback from successful, or indeed unsuccessful, attempts to meet challenging, explicitly, stated goals.

The absence of specific interim goals for improvement is a school-wide issue, extending down to the level of the individual classroom lesson. Although teachers tend to start lessons by stating the objectives, it is not clear that teachers have specific ways of measuring the extent to which all students have mastered these objectives through specific assessments designed for this purpose.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Russell Sage School (JHS 190)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school.</li> </ul>		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	