



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

George J. Ryan Middle School

Middle School 216

64-20 175th Street

Queens

NY 11365

Principal: Reginald Landeau Jr.

Dates of review: November 20 - 22, 2006

Reviewer: Martyn Groucutt

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

George J. Ryan is a large middle school with 1273 students enrolled. The school provides education for grades 6 through 8. The proportion of special education students is lower than in other schools. The school has a large number of students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The current composition is 55% Asian and other, 15% White, 15% Black and 15% Hispanic. The Asian designation covers students from a number of countries, such as India, China and Korea, while the White population also covers a number of groups, such as those originally from Russia. There is a higher proportion of English language learners than in similar schools, but a lower proportion than in schools across the City. A much higher proportion of students have recently arrived in the country than in other schools. Most of these students were born in South Korea, with others born in China and Bangladesh. Attendance over this school year is currently running at 96.7% compared to the City average of 91.6%. There is a 97% stability in the student population, which is again ahead of the City average of 93.7%.

The school is organized into three academies, each led by an assistant principal. The school has entered into a partnership with the education department at St John's University. The school provides a venue for university student placements, while the university provides a variety of professional development opportunities for teachers and a Saturday program for the school's students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has brought clear direction and vision in taking the school forward.
- The development of the three academies, each under the effective leadership of an assistant principal, has strengthened effective teaching and learning.
- The data binders used by teachers of mathematics and English language arts provide at-a-glance data on the progress of individual students.
- The effective collaboration with St John's University provides external academic support for helping the school to improve.
- There is an effective plan for further developing the use of technology across the school.
- The plans for students thought to be at risk are constructed carefully.
- Mainstream opportunities for special education students are maximizing their achievement.
- The Sustainable Growth Team encourages real commitment to the school from teachers.
- The students feel that the school is a safe and welcoming environment in which they can learn effectively.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop individual professional development plans for all teachers.
- Analyze and address the wide disparity in test results from apparently similar classes.
- Develop ways in which the performance of different groups of students can be compared and monitored.
- Continue to develop the use of differentiated instruction, so that it can address the needs of individual students.
- Seek to ensure the effective use of technology as a tool for supporting teaching and learning across the whole curriculum.
- Seek ways to celebrate publicly the cultural and ethnic diversity of the school.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with well-developed features.

The current principal arrived in the school as an intern from the Principal's College four years ago, taking over as principal at the end of his year's placement. Since then he has refocused the school and it is increasingly competent in using data to measure individual student progress and the effectiveness of its curriculum. Rising results in mathematics and English language arts reflect this improvement. There is still work to be done in gaining the fullest benefit from the increasingly sophisticated use of data, but there is a real commitment to doing it successfully.

The great diversity within the school is recognized as a strength, although the success in enabling students from so many backgrounds to work together in a spirit of harmony and cooperation is not always celebrated fully. There is good provision for English language learners. A sense of belonging is fostered through the developing Academy system. The strong partnership with St John's University is proving a most valuable collaboration and it is promoting the development of the school very effectively.

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, with well-developed features.

The school is becoming increasingly sophisticated in using a range of data to track students' performance and progress. Grow Report analysis of results in tests is used effectively and teachers are able to concentrate on areas of weakness revealed through item analysis. The Princeton Review is another useful tool and parents are given the information to support them going on-line with their children to reinforce work undertaken in class. English language arts and mathematics teachers undertake their own item analysis of results, highlighting areas needing development. Other departments are not yet undertaking this exercise, however.

A range of informal data sources are used, such as the diagnostics provided in the new social studies materials being used in grade 8, making the school aware of strengths and areas for development prior to students taking the State tests. Writing samples and portfolios are two other positive examples of data gathering, being undertaken in English language arts and mathematics, although again this is not happening elsewhere.

While the analysis of data relating to individual performance is becoming increasingly effective, there are some difficulties in looking at broader groups, and particularly in the analysis of ethnic group performance. The school's designation of White, for example, does not allow any distinction between American and Russian students in the school. This limits the ability of the school to analyze group performance. There is effective tracking of special education students and those considered to be at risk.

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, with well-developed features.

Data binders are effective tools for collecting formal and informal information on individual students in English language arts and mathematics, though not yet elsewhere. For students at risk, they include a log of strategies for maximizing individual outcomes. Student performance is a focus for academy, grade and department meetings. Data is therefore used, though not equally effectively across different subjects, to examine individual progress. Timeframes set out in effective curriculum maps are flexible and adjusted in the light of the evidence from collaborative discussions.

Collaborative planning is generally effective in developing plans and timeframes for student progress, and for school improvement. Gains report information provides the focus for monthly meetings between English language arts and mathematics teachers with the principal. The assistant principals have equivalent conversations with the leaders of the other curriculum areas. There is therefore a whole school and an individual student focus in the examination of available data.

Care is taken to monitor the progress of students in greatest need, both in the effective planning for those at risk who are monitored by the pupil personnel team, and for the special education students. The school tries to maximize the mainstream opportunities for this latter group, which it does well, as shown in the good progress made by the students.

There are good links with parents, who are seen as partners whose support is encouraged through an open door policy. While there is reluctance on the part of a few teachers to go beyond their contractual minimum, overall the school is developing as a community in which all stakeholders are pulling together for the good of the school. Students say they feel safe and able to learn effectively.

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, with well-developed features.

The academies are each ably led by an assistant principal. This allows students to gain from continuity of academy leader and guidance counselor throughout the school. The smaller organization results in more focused relationships, in which individual needs are better understood and students get to know their teams of academy teachers well. There is a mutual respect. Lessons are scheduled within the academy framework, reinforcing this relationship. Teachers appointed by the principal are expected to demonstrate empathy with the vision and direction of the school, based around school improvement.

Data is used to inform the development of curriculum maps, with these flexible documents being amended in the light of emerging needs. Teaching is intended to be flexible, so that areas not fully understood by students can be revisited. Spiraling allows for topics to be reinforced over time in order to maximize understanding, and informal data from ongoing teacher assessment is a good source of evidence for this.

Teachers are increasingly being held accountable for the outcomes of their students as more data becomes available. For example, the grade 8 social studies results obtained for the first time this year shows a very wide disparity in results between apparently similar groups. The school is tracking teaching back, seeking to learn lessons in how to bring all up to the standards of the best. Similarly, analysis of why English language arts results lag behind those of mathematics has resulted in a new drive to introduce literacy across the whole curriculum.

Teachers use data to group students for instruction, but there is still a need to develop opportunities to address individual needs identified by the data. The principal is developing the effective use of technology across the curriculum which will support differentiation, together with training for teachers to use it effectively. Where this already exists it is used effectively, yet it remains an area for whole school improvement.

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 principal has brought direction and a clear vision to the school, which he has refocused so it is now student centered and looking to maximise individual potential. He is widely respected by those who share his vision of progress through individual accountability. Many, but not all, staff share this vision, so that results are showing clear improvement over the last three years. Professional discussions focus on student learning, using the increasing data that is being made available to teachers. This does not yet extend to the creation of individual professional development plans for individual teachers to support their own best practice, however. Effective classroom observations mean that the principal and assistant principals know their teachers very well, enabling them to provide effective support.

Planning takes place in teams based on academies, grades and departments and there is a developing sense of collaboration. This is well illustrated by the creation of the Sustainable Growth Team, enabling teachers to become involved in decision making.

Professional development is driven by the needs revealed by data and the process is supported by the excellent links being forged with St John's University. For example, this year they are working with social studies teachers looking at curriculum development. They are also supporting the professional development of the principal and assistant principals. St John's also provides a Saturday program for students to attend classes at the university.

There are other examples of youth development and support services being used to promote academic goals. The Out of School Time program provides opportunities for students to do homework and then participate in a social program after the school day, and the Beacon program is supporting those students who want to apply for specialist high schools, both of which are run by Samuel Field YMCA.

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, with well-developed features.

As more data is becoming available, and internal systems are becoming more focused on individual progress, the school is developing systems through which it can measure individual progress towards goals and modify planning and teaching when appropriate. The effective use of curriculum mapping includes a built in flexibility that enables teachers to revisit areas that have not been fully understood and as a result students learning is more effective. A good example of using data that has just become available has been in the social studies department. It is introducing a new scheme that contains a diagnostic tool enabling interim assessment, so that students will benefit from knowing their strengths and areas for development before sitting the State test and teachers can address the needs that are shown. Another example is in English language arts, where teachers are refining their skills in conferencing with their students, which will provide information on progress and support students' ability to understand their own progress. These examples show that the school is developing its ability to evaluate student progress during the course of the year and the flexibility to change in-year will help meet individual needs and maximize individual performance.

Mathematics teachers show the most sophisticated practice. They use common planning time to link the pacing calendar to the curriculum map, and to support areas identified as weak through spiraling. Student portfolios and teachers' data records demonstrate individual progress through the year, while Princeton Review data is used effectively to look at areas in which individual students can be better supported. As a result mathematics scores have improved over each of the last three years and this is providing a beacon for other departments to follow.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

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| SCHOOL NAME: George J. Ryan (MS 216) | ∅ | ✓ | + |
| Quality Score | | X | |

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| 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.

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| 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 | |

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| 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 | |