



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Rachel Carson School

Intermediate School 237

**46 – 21 Golden Street
Queens
NY 11355**

Principal: Joseph Cantara

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Reviewer: Peter Lewis

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

This is a long established junior high school which provides an education for just over a thousand students from 7th to 9th grade. The principal has been leading the school since 1994, and is only the third principal since the school's opening thirty five years ago. The school is currently in the process of arranging to open the next academic year as a middle school with students in 6th to 8th grades. In this, it will be reflecting the philosophy under which it has already been operating for some time. Just over 58% of students are Asian, a much higher proportion than in other schools across the City, and, of the remainder, 27% are Hispanic, 18% are Black and 6% White. The school is Title I eligible with 68.4% of students qualifying. The student population includes 7.1% special education students and 18.5% English language learners. School attendance is high, at over 92 %, when compared with similar and City-wide schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has been successful in building a highly committed leadership team who shares his vision of high expectations.
- Leaders are respected by staff and students because of their very good balance of expertise and experience.
- Meetings of administrators and faculty focus strongly on accelerating learning.
- Through the increasing use of data, supported by focused monitoring, a very good start has been made in establishing a strong sense of accountability among staff.
- In the best instruction, lessons are planned with reference to students' abilities and, as a result, they make rapid gains in their learning.
- The school is well organized so that staff and students know what is expected of them and, as a result, the school runs smoothly.
- Relationships in the school are good and strongly rooted in mutual respect and courtesy.
- Students demonstrate good attitudes to their learning and describe their pride in being part of a school which values them and their views.
- Improvements made over time, and the differences that newly introduced initiatives have begun to make, demonstrate the clear capacity for further improvement

What the school needs to improve

- Improve teachers' use of assessment information in planning lessons in which activities are precisely planned according to the needs of different students.
- Analyze of the comparative performance of groups by gender or ethnicity in order to focus precisely on the needs of these students.
- Ensure that all teachers make good use of test and other assessment data, including the improved teacher assessments, to set and communicate targets for students' achievement.
- Refine curriculum planning, alongside teachers' skills of assessment in English language arts and mathematics, so that progress in these can be measured across other subjects such as science and social studies.
- Develop a simplified strategic action plan that includes key areas for development and the interim assessments that will enable progress to be measured and adjustments made where necessary.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school in which there are a number of well developed features.

Very strong leadership has been provided by the principal and is echoed by staff in leadership positions who also demonstrate a strong commitment to the school. Parents, students and staff are proud to belong to such a well established school that is very much part of its community and all feel well cared for and supported. Parents particularly like the degree to which the principal and other staff are welcoming and ready to take swift action to address any problems.

There is clear evidence of improvement in the school's ability to analyze its performance and to plan for improvement. This is seen in the improvements in attendance and in students' achievement in English language arts and in mathematics. The curriculum has been modified so that it aligns well with local and State requirements and provides a very good range of stimulating activities that interest students and consequently accelerate their learning. These are areas which the school recognized needed improving as a result of its own evaluations. In particular, the school has identified the need to improve students' learning further through planning instruction that is targeted more precisely at students' needs and it has made a good start in establishing consistency in this.

Relationships and teamwork are strong and, as a result, staff are beginning to work together within a shared vision of what is possible. Planning for school improvement is comprehensive but, at present, lacks sufficient detail to enable the school to track progress sufficiently. However, because of its many positive features, the school has made considerable improvements in its instruction and curriculum for its students, and 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 proficient.

The school gathers a comprehensive range of data on the performance of its students. Records of students' test and assessment data are collated, and the school makes effective use of these in identifying student progress. Through analysis and discussion, it has made a good start in identifying patterns of achievement across subjects, classes and grades. Use of this data is developing, as the school's understanding of its potential to guide instruction grows. As a result, comparisons between the school's performance and that of other schools are routinely used and are informing the school's comparisons of performance between classes, grades and subjects. Although systems to track the rates of progress from one level to the next are at an early stage, the information has already been used to identify students who need to be targeted for improvement. This strategy has yet to be refined to analyze the comparative performance of boys and girls or of ethnic groups within the school. While, for example, existing data shows a marked underachievement of boys in English language arts over the last two years, the school has yet to ascertain the reasons for this or to plan action to address the issue.

The principal is determined to secure further improvement and recognizes that teachers' confidence in assessing students' development through the year is not as good as it could be. Focused professional development has begun with the aim of addressing this issue, for example, through training teachers in the use of commercial software to illuminate progress in mathematics. A good model for this work already exists in the good use that is made of assessments of the gains made by students with identified learning difficulties, which are used well in planning focused interventions should their progress slow.

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.

School leaders bring a good range of knowledge and experience to their work that is supported by high expectations of themselves, staff and students. Because of these features, and the principal's drive, there are good levels of collaboration and a clear understanding of those aspects of its work that the school needs to improve. The school has put in place a wide range of assessment information. This has begun to assist it in planning work for its students and in setting goals for their achievement. The need for significant improvement in both English language arts and math, for example, was identified from analysis of student results and plans were developed to improve aspects of the curriculum and of teaching. That these plans were appropriate and successful is seen in the increase in student achievement through both subjects. However, the information is not yet utilized fully in, for example, setting clear targets for student achievement. The focus on subject areas has achieved the school's set goals, and certainly reflects an insistence on 'achieving the best'. None the less, the lack of analyses of the comparative performance of groups by gender or ethnicity hampers the school in focusing precisely on the needs of these students.

The increasing numbers of special education students and English language learners are well supported. Expectations are high and teaching and individual education plans identify the small steps needed to ensure progress. The school's efforts have recently been boosted with a considerable infusion of resources. Regular meetings involving teachers and support staff ensure a rapid response to emerging issues, the success of which is seen in the reduction of the numbers of English language learners not testing out of the program. As yet, these strategies have not been applied across ability groups and subjects. Because of this, too much variation still remains in the degree to which teachers plan work which challenges all students. As a result, students, and their parents are not always aware of the level at which they are working or of what they need to do in order to improve or reach the next level.

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.

The school makes good and creative use of its budget to support the curriculum and planned improvements. The curriculum for English language arts and mathematics are developed well and the school has made a good beginning in its use of data to develop links between these and social studies and science. Staff deployment and the schedule

for instruction are considered in the light of what will help students the most. Overall patterns of student achievement are analyzed and used in identifying strengths, as well as areas which require further development. A good example of this is the work that successfully improved student progress in English language arts and mathematics. The school is moving further towards ensuring teachers' accountability for students' learning through its current emphasis on establishing differentiated instruction. It recognizes that more needs to be done in helping teachers to use data more consistently to set and track targets for different students.

The school maintains a strong focus on student attendance and this, together with a good range of well-understood systems has been very successful in securing continued improvement. Relationships between students and teachers are strong and very well modeled by the principal and assistant principals. Students themselves say how much they enjoy coming to the school and, particularly, the wide range of experiences on offer through the curriculum and after school activities. They have a very positive attitude to their learning. While students describe how they are often made to work hard, they also describe inconsistencies in this, and reflect the school's view that clearer communication by teachers of the things that they need to do in order to improve would help in 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 principal has a clear vision for the school's development is increasingly shared by staff. This is brought about through focused monitoring, the commitment of the assistant principals, and carefully planned professional development. High expectations are demonstrated in, for example, the shared understanding of the purpose of lesson observations that is established through the monthly instructional focus. Classroom observation is well planned. There is clear evidence that the good range of support that is provided has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching across the school. Evaluation and research have been used very well in identifying that this range of observations has been focused too heavily upon on instruction rather than on what students learned. Action has already begun to address this. At the same time, the principal has demonstrated his determination to secure the best for students through focused appointments and assignment of staff. The deployment of assistant principals to leadership positions within the school's house system leads to a good level of coherence in meetings and in ensuring good levels of collaboration.

Regular meetings between the principal and assistant principals draw together information about the impact of professional development and, as a result, increasingly help the school in responding to student need. For example, the introduction of materials and professional development targeted at improving the teaching of key aspects of English language arts and mathematics has secured improvements in student achievement. Modeling instruction and coaching have been utilized well in demonstrating expectations of practice and approach. The involvement of the principal and assistant principals in team meetings ensures that information gained from monitoring is used to inform the agenda. Because of these features, teamwork is strong and most teachers demonstrate a high level of professional commitment. Staff frequently give their own time to furthering school developments, for example in looking at newly introduced assessment materials for

mathematics. A sense of purpose, backed by smoothly operating organization and well-established community and support partnerships, pervades the school.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

The school is rapidly improving its understanding and use of student data in establishing whole-school goals and in assessing the degree to which improvement has been secured. Targets are set for English language learners, and special education students and the progress that they make towards achieving them is tracked accurately. Although clear and accurate information is provided for other students, the school acknowledges that this is still predominantly retrospective and more needs to be done to help them understand the next stages of learning they will undertake. In a similar way, the school has accurately identified that inconsistencies remain in the degree to which data has been used across grades both in identifying areas that require improvement and in modifying goals. Discussion, accurate monitoring and professional development have enabled the school to establish an effective understanding of the degree to which it has met its goals successfully by the end of each planning period. This information is used effectively in identifying areas which require further improvement. However, while improvement planning includes a good range of strategies that have the potential to secure success, objectives are not set in such a way as to enable interim measures of progress to be made easily, nor to analyze where modification is necessary. The school has a good range of informal mechanisms to help it decide whether it is on track towards achieving success but recognizes that the establishment of 'markers' which demonstrate the progress made towards planned goals would help it in more readily taking action to modify plans should improvement be faster or slower than intended.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Rachel L Carson (IS 237)	∅	✓	+
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		