



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Police Officer Ramon Suarez School

Public School 239

1715 Weirfield Street

Queens

NY 11385

Principal: Robin Connolly

Dates of review: April 23 - 24, 2007

Reviewer: Alan Geller

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Police Officer Ramon Suarez School, Public School 239, located in the Ridgewood section of Queens is an elementary school with 843 students from pre-kindergarten to grade 5. The majority of the school (80%) is Hispanic which is higher than similar or City schools. The remainder of the school is 10% White, 2% Black and 8% Asian and other ethnic groups. There are 229 students who are English language learners which comprises 27% of the school. These students are mainly serviced by English as second language teachers who provide a push-in model of instruction. Special education students comprise approximately 9% of the school and are serviced in self contained and collaborative team teaching classes. The school receives Title I Funding in that over 82% of the students are eligible which slightly above similar and City schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is an effective leader who is respected by the students, staff and parents and has created a positive learning environment.
- Procedures and routines are well developed resulting in a safe school that runs efficiently
- The parents are very pleased with the open lines of communication between the school and the parents.
- The school collects data to monitor the progress of its students and to inform the instructional program.
- Teachers respect their students and are committed to providing each child with the skills to achieve.
- School wide committees such as the academic intervention team work collaboratively to ensure that each child receives a quality educational program.
- Teachers have high expectations for their students resulting in classes that are actively engaged in learning.
- The workshop model is utilized in all classrooms providing students with the opportunity to interact closely with their classmates and their teachers.
- Student attendance is on an upward trend due to the nurturing environment of the school and the positive incentives awarded to students and classes.
- The overall tone of the school has improved as a result of training techniques that focus on the learning styles of the students.

What the school needs to improve

- Review the consistency and effectiveness of the tracking systems in the school.
- Continue to raise the literacy achievement levels of English language learners.
- Further develop instruction in social studies as a means to increase reading skill levels.
- Continue to provide additional strategies, through scheduling, for students in need of improvement.
- Continue to develop the partnership with your community based organization to further enhance basic skill needs.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with some well-developed features.

This is an effective school that is committed to setting high expectations for all students. The current principal started the school in 2003 and since then has developed her vision and mission for the school. The drive and energy she has brought to the position has created a school that is working well. The school is dedicated to developing life long learning for its students and staff. The principal models this goal well, she and her team continually seek out research based programs and activities that have served to develop active learners. This has raised the achievement levels of students. Teachers have been trained to recognize the learning styles of students, and as a result they constantly challenge them to improve further through the use of a wide range of strategies. This initiative has improved the classroom management skills of teachers, and resulted in a very positive school tone.

The school collects and tracks data in a variety of ways as a means of improving the skill level of each child. This has resulted in a positive overall trend in State test scores. From its partnership with Columbia University's Teachers' College Reading and Writing Project there are now specific reading and writing assessment tools that have been put to good use to improve student outcomes. This program productively supports the professional development of teachers. Teachers are actively involved in observing each other teach and participate in debriefing sessions in where they can reflect on strategies that best support student learning. The teachers genuinely enjoy talking about their programs and the progress of the students. The parents are very pleased with the positive academic and emotional support received by their children. They work closely with the school to support its programs.

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 principal actively promotes the use of data by all staff. She has developed charts to show trends in students' performance. This information is shared with the staff to improve their understanding of what needs to be done to raise student achievement even further. The school gathers extensive data in reading, mathematics and writing as a basis for tracking student progress. Teachers maintain worthwhile records of progress and conference one on one with students to determine their strengths and challenges. This information is used thoughtfully to identify each child's needs and to select children who will benefit most from academic intervention programs. The school continually seeks to develop the effective use of data and has implemented plans that have helped to improve initial reading assessments and the tracking of progress in writing. Data is used to determine the needs of individual students as well as classes and grades, but there are some inconsistencies in the way this is done across the school.

Data concerning English language learners is maintained as a means of ensuring that each student will receive the appropriate amount of service. However, the school recognizes that it continues to need to find ways to further support these students. Special education students are also carefully tracked and receive additional interventions as needed. The collaborative team teaching model has proven to be successful as a result of the improved teacher to student ratio. This allows for a great deal of small group and one on one instruction. Mathematics results have improved as this has been the focus of school cabinet and grade level team meetings. At the meetings the level of achievement is checked, plans are adjusted to ensure maximum impact.

The principal makes good use of comparisons to other schools as a means of measuring the school's success. She maintains a log of data on the progress of each child, class and grade which gives a valuable means of comparing the different rates of development. This data also serves to inform decision making related to selection of new staff and materials. Work has begun to review subject areas to see how they can be more effective in improving the overall skill needs of students. This work has just begun and has not yet taken hold. The principal is aware that students with interrupted formal education may need further tracking to monitor their progress due to their absenteeism.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The goal setting process is effective, it takes its focus from the Comprehensive Education Plan and these goals are discussed at weekly meetings by the school cabinet. The teaching staff are knowledgeable about their students' academic and personal development, and fully committed to ensuring the achievement of school goals. Teams of teachers work on curriculum over the summer months to guarantee the program will be ready for the upcoming year.

Every teacher keeps detailed information on the progress of individual students and that of their whole class. Teachers are trained to finalize a kid watching form which notes a child's strengths and weaknesses and this is then used as a basis to analyze their challenges and to determine their next learning steps. In addition, this is strengthened by conferencing with students to discover their strengths and challenges. This leads to the production of long range goals that have specific timeframes. The coaches meet weekly with each grade to review the data and to improve the instructional plan. As a result of these meetings teachers and coaches set goals for their students and classes and for the entire grade. These are further refined by the school cabinet. However, students' mastery of skills is not clearly evident in this process.

The academic intervention team closely monitors students in greatest need. These teachers are very knowledgeable about the school programs and the performance levels of students. Resources are secured to help them that are research based and have a proven record of success. The progress of these children is discussed by the team and specific timeframes are set to monitor their achievement. The team talk with the classroom teachers and this ensures good support for each child.

The school's high expectations for each child result in engaged classrooms where all students learn. Parents and teachers communicate well and share information often and

openly. Parents are involved in many school activities which provide additional support in helping their children.

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 school curriculum has built in assessments allowing the accurate recording of achievement. These programs enable the staff to successfully review performance progress of the students. The staff have also brought in supplementary resources based upon researched based criteria and these are successfully meeting the specific to needs of individual students. The staff receives helpful training in using the data and this is beginning to enable them to provide instruction that is differentiated, although this process is still developing. Mini-lessons are planned as strategy lessons for small groups based upon student’s needs. Teachers are held properly accountable by the school leaders who observe lessons and meet with the teachers to analyze their plans and student outcomes. They also want to see if groups are flexible and change according to the skills needs of the students. Coaching sessions are an invaluable means of developing these strategies as a part of the accountability process.

Budgeting, staffing and scheduling are aligned to meet the needs of students based upon the interpretation of data. Successful strategies include the use of additional intervention teachers to provide small group instruction to students in greatest need, additional instructional, a reduction in grade 5 classsize and improved student teacher ratio. All of these are focused on making the workshop model more successful at raising achievement. Scheduling is based upon ensuring that every child receives some additional academic intervention service, yet some students who are pulled-out do not receive the extra time to meet their needs.

Students are constantly engaged in activities that they enjoy. They are well supported by nurturing staff, who respect the students. Attendance trends have improved so that the current rate is almost 93%. This is reinforced by the good quality instructional program and parents and staff who support the goals of the school and incentives that allow students to receive rewards for their attendance.

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 school carefully selects staff based upon their commitment to work collaboratively and their ability to enjoy participating in life long learning opportunities. The school’s success in appointing good quality teachers has resulted in an upward trend in State scores. The teachers’ professional development is based upon a survey of the needs of the staff and is focused on supporting programs to improve students learning. The school partners with Teachers’ College who provides staff developers on site. This has helped to improve the quality of the English language arts program. Training in analyzing the data is ongoing and focused on assessing student work to determine their skill needs. Teachers use a rubric in mathematics and literacy to self evaluate themselves and to rate themselves as a

grade in order to determine how well they are doing. The impact of professional development is evident in the engaged classrooms and the quality of work that is well monitored by the school leaders.

Teachers work in lab sites where they observe each other and debrief by engaging in peer and self evaluation activities. The principal frequently observes staff and provides feedback by noting the impact of the strategies they are using to meet the needs of all of their students. The principal will often provide support to teachers based upon these visits. This includes planning intervisitations so teachers can learn from each other. The cabinet monitors and evaluates results and has revised their plans in order to find better ways to assess progress. The school recently adopted a program to train teachers to use the learning styles of students as a means to help them to learn more. This also has resulted in helping new teachers improve their classroom management plan as they learn more about each child.

The principal is well respected and has the support of the parents, students and staff. She fosters a culture of continuous learning which has involved teachers in study groups as they seek to improve themselves and their students. The principal has developed a positive tone in the school with well developed procedures resulting in a school that runs well. The school partners with the greater Ridgewood Youth Council which provides homework help for students after school, yet it does not always provide specific support for students in their area of need.

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 well developed.

The school leaders and the coaches are very enthusiastic about the timely monitoring of school activities. The school leaders frequently observe the programs with the coaches and use the grade level meetings to provide feedback and to plan next steps. Data compiled by teachers is regularly reviewed along with the student work found in their notebooks. The Comprehensive Educational Plan is used to measure goal achievement and is used as a tool to revise plans to ensure that goals are achieved. The academic intervention team monitors the progress of school programs and determines the areas that need to be further developed. These observations are successfully shared with the cabinet and with grades at meetings to determine if revisions are necessary.

The school makes good use of information to make decisions such as moving into another data tracking system created by Teachers' College. This is currently being piloted by the school and staff believe it will further improve the writing achievement. The mathematics program is currently under scrutiny to make it more suitable to adapt it to the workshop model. In most cases initial programs will be changed as a means of selecting better programs more geared to the students. The school has developed some strong teams that are able to quickly revise plans and implement changes. The regular coaching meetings with grade level teams are particularly effective in revising plans and selecting and implementing changes.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Police Officer Ramon Suarez School (PS 239)	∅	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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