



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle School

Intermediate School 250

75-40 Parsons Boulevard

Queens

NY 11366

Principal: Marc Rosenberg

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Reviewer: Stephen Walker

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle School (IS 250) is a small school with 173 students from grades 5 through to 8. It is located in the southern end of Flushing and shares the building with the Robert F. Kennedy High School. It was created by District 25 in 1992 to meet the needs of students who might not have succeeded in a larger school. The school draws its students from throughout the community through an application and selection process. The school is housed in a well kept modern building with 8 classrooms and a shared gymnasium and cafeteria. There is no outside playing area and 4 classes share an open space in the basement of the building.

The school population consist of a rich mixture of cultures with 33% White, 25% Asian, 22% Black and 20% Hispanic. Eighteen percent of the students have special educational needs. A special feature of the school is the Service Learning Program where every student volunteers each week to take part in community service at a service learning site.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school performs well when compared to City and similar schools. Most students make good progress during their time at the school.
- Class sizes are small and there is a strong emphasis on supporting students who might not have succeeded in a larger school.
- There is a shared commitment among staff to the achievement and personal development of all students.
- There is a positive culture in the school resulting in good attendance and good behavior by the majority of students.
- The principal provides reflective, supportive and accessible leadership with a clear emphasis on student performance and success.
- The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and the principal is well supported by the teams of teachers and support staff.
- The majority of teaching is at least proficient and promotes effective learning.
- Imaginative intervention programs support students who require additional help with their work.
- There are good systems of guidance and support which enhance the academic and personal development of students.
- The school works closely with parents who value the work of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Further interpret the available assessment data to identify any differences in the performance and progress of students by gender and ethnic groups.
- Develop the setting of individual performance goals, based on prior achievement, that are shared with parents and students.
- Develop a more standardized system for all teachers to record homework, assessment information and areas for development for individual students.
- Encourage further instructional differentiation in classes so that teachers address more closely the individual learning needs of students.
- Develop further classroom observations so that best practice in teaching and learning is shared across the school
- Ensure that the Comprehensive Education Plan is a working document with clear whole school issues and that subject specialists are delegated responsibility for writing their sections of the plan.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

This is overall a proficient school with some undeveloped and some well developed features. The school is unique in that it is a small school with small classes that support students who might not have succeeded in a larger school. There is a particular emphasis on individual students who are all well known by the teachers and support staff. The school is popular with parents who apply for places through a selection process. Students progress well in the school and are well prepared for life the high school.

The school uses assessment data to track the performance of students on an individual and class basis. However, it does not fully analyze the differences in attainment of different groups within the school. Intervention strategies are personalized and support students who require additional help with their work. Attendance and test results are high when compared to City and similar schools.

Assessment data is used to modify the curriculum but it is not well used to differentiate instructional activity to meet the needs of individual students. Programs of professional development and formal lesson observation are not used sufficiently to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

The principal is well respected by the parents, teachers and students. He is aware of the areas of development including the need for more formal systems of recording student information and monitoring the quality of teaching. He is confident that the school can address the areas for development and move on to its next stage of development and improvement.

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 uses the assessment data produced by the education department as well as internal information from the teachers in order to track the progress of individual and groups of students. The school performs well when compared to City and similar schools and most students make good progress during their time at the school. The 'school is in good standing' and met the annual yearly progress targets in reading, mathematics and science in 2006. The principal undertakes an analysis of performance by student, class and grade. The school is very conscious of the number of students who are performing below the State standard (level 3) in English language arts and mathematics in the State and City standardised assessments. It is also aware that the percentage of students gaining levels 3 and 4 in the grade 8 State tests are lower in science than in English

language arts and mathematics. The school is particularly well developed in providing assessment data on the performance and progress of special education students.

Analysis of data informs the principal of any differences between teachers and the performance of their classes. Details of results are openly shared with the teachers so that support can be given to improve student performance. The school uses the data from the elementary schools in order to form the heterogeneous teaching groups in grade 5. It also uses the assessment information to compare with previous attainment by students in order to measure progress. However, the school does not interpret the available assessment data to identify any differences in the performance and progress of students by gender and ethnic groups across the school and there are significant trends that have, to date, been missed. The school does not compare its results with similar schools across the City.

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.

The small class sizes and the emphasis on the individual supports students who might not have succeeded in a larger school. There is a shared commitment among staff to the achievement and personal development of all students. The principal meets weekly with the pupil personnel team and bi-weekly with the teachers in order to discuss the individual performance of students. Report cards are analyzed by the principal for each marking period and any underachievement identified is discussed with individual teachers.

The school has not developed a standardized system for all teachers to record homework, assessment information and areas for development for individual students. The frequency of the grading of students’ work is variable, although some teachers provide supportive and diagnostic comments stating clearly how students can improve their work. The English language arts department has developed a teacher-student reading conference form that keeps a useful record of the discussions and clarifies what the students will need to work on in order to improve their grades.

Regular intervention programs support students who require additional help with their work. The school targets support for the lower performing level 1 and 2 students in both reading and mathematics. Literacy and mathematics programs in small groups are mandated for ‘at risk students’ and offered to any other students during the 37.5 minute additional block before and after school. Targeted students also receive at risk services during the day from the resource room teacher, literacy coach, mathematics coach and Individualized education program teacher. Struggling readers in both special education and mainstream classes are programmed for the Wilson Reading Program. The school adopts a flexible ‘push in and pull out approach’ to classes for special education students. This results in significant improvements in test scores.

The school works closely with parents who value the work of the school. Parents and caregivers are provided with regular report cards and are invited to parent teacher conferences twice a year. Parents find these conferences very useful and praise the teachers for their work with the students. However, the setting of specific individual performance goals, based on prior achievement are not always shared with parents and students.

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.

Curriculum programs are arranged within the constraints of a limited budget. All students take English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies and physical education. There is a visual arts program although there is no scheduling for music, drama or dance. All students are given a computer technology period and there is an expectation that teachers will infuse technology into the different subject areas. A special feature of the school is that all students take part in community service learning program which supports their confidence and enables them to make a contribution to society. Students make weekly visits, during school time, to local nurseries and pre schools as well as to the Meadow Park Rehabilitation Center.

Teachers are expected to teach across the subjects in grades 5 and 6 while specialist teachers take most classes in grades 7 and 8. Teachers use data from the Grow Report and other assessments to provide instructional emphasis on students’ strengths and areas for development. For example, English language arts teachers are presently working in grade 7 on the development of literacy skills in the use of words and phrases in context and the motives, feelings and traits of character. In a different way, the physical education teacher uses the skills tests to form mixed ability groups when organizing games such as kimball and roller hockey. Budgeting decisions are clearly focused on improving students’ performance and the recent Project Arts funding was spent specifically on supporting the creative arts including a resident artist and student visits to a Broadway show.

The majority of teaching is proficient and promotes effective learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and many actively engage the students in the lessons. Students respond well to questions, discussions and a variety of learning activities. Some teachers lecture to the classes too much and do not always check that the students understand the work. One student commented that ‘the best teachers make learning fun, check you understand the work and regularly mark your assignments with helpful comments’. There is limited instructional differentiation in classes so teachers do not always address the individual learning needs of students.

There is a positive culture in the school resulting in good attendance and proactive behavior by the majority of students. Attendance of students is over 96% for this academic year and this reflects highly on the support from parents and caregivers. The school contacts the home by telephone for first day absences and letters are sent home for lateness or more than one day absences.

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.

There is minimal staff turnover at the school but new staff are appointed on their ability to motivate and raise the performance and progress of the students. Professional development is coordinated by the professional development team including the principal and the mathematics and literacy coaches. The emphasis of the training is to strengthen the teachers’ knowledge base and to improve the instruction in the classroom. The

training day during the review included well organised workshops on reading and comprehension as well as training on navigating the test assessment websites such as the Princeton Review and Grow Network. However, many teachers felt the quality and amount of training needs to be reviewed so that the program of professional development more directly supports them with their work in the classrooms.

The principal and coaches do not formally observe all teachers on a regular basis and, as a result there are limited opportunities for teaching staff to receive feedback on strengths and areas for improvement. Many teachers have opted for an alternative discussion with the principal so that it is not always possible to monitor the variation in teacher quality across the school. Critical analysis of performance including peer observations and inter-visitations are not a feature of the school. At the moment, classroom observations are not being used as a tool for sharing best practice in teaching and learning across the school.

The experienced principal provides reflective and accessible leadership. He is well respected by the parents, teachers and students. He clearly understands the issues in the school and has developed a good rapport and supportive approach with all members of the school community. He is well aware that he has perhaps not addressed vigorously enough the issues of space, use of rooms and State of furniture in order to further enhance the conditions for teaching and learning. However, the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis supported by the teams of teachers and support staff. There are good systems of guidance and pupil personnel which help the academic achievement and personal development of students.

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.

There are good systems to evaluate the intervention programs particularly for the students who are performing at levels 1 and 2. The resource room teacher records the progress of students who receive extra help and adjusts interventions as a result of the analysis of teacher assessments. Targeted support by the resource room teacher, literacy coach, mathematics coach and individual education program teacher are particularly successful in moving students up a level in their assessments.

Performance reviews between the principal and the teachers ensure that students are tracked after each marking period and that underachievement is identified and remedied. Report card data is openly discussed with the teachers and appropriate changes are made to instructional and individual programs. For example, in the case of science, it was agreed to increase the amount of 'hands-on experience' for all grade 5-8 students in order to raise performance levels in this subject. There is also a regular discussion between teachers to ensure the balance in classes between withdrawal and integration of special educational students.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is discussed with the teachers and the senior leadership team in order to provide a whole school perspective for the year. There is a common thread in the plan of decreasing the number of students performing at levels 1 and 2 and increasing the number of students performing at level 3 or above in City and State assessments. However, there is not a clear definition of the key priorities and actions

for the whole school that can be shared across the subject areas in order to raise the performance of the students. The school does not delegate the writing of the plan to the subject specialists so the CEP is not fully a working document with specific, measurable action plans that are fully owned by the teachers.

The school is popular with parents and provides a unique opportunity for students who benefit from smaller classes within a small school. The school is continually evaluating its performance and seeking new ways to improve the learning and progress of the students. Monitoring arrangements of teaching are not fully developed although teachers are accountable for the performance of their students. The school has capacity for further improvement and success as it moves on to its next stage of its development.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle School (IS 250)	∅	✓	+
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	