



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Ralph R. McKee High School**

**High School 600**

**290 St. Marks Place  
Staten Island  
NY 10301**

**Principal: Linda A. Waite**

**Dates of review: January 9 - 10, 2007**

**Reviewer: David King**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Ralph R. McKee High School is located in St. George's on State Island . It is a non-zoned public high school that attracts students from all boroughs. There are 779 students enrolled. There are 132 students receiving special education services. Fourteen of these students are taught in a collaborative team teaching class and 114 are placed in daily-living classes. There are 15 English language learners. The school is eligible for Title 1 funding. The ethnic breakdown is 28% White, 39% Black, 30% Hispanic and 3% Asian and others. The gender breakdown is 64% male and 36% female. Attendance has improved over the last four years from 85% in 2003 to 93% at present. The school motto is "Every Child a Graduate".

Ralph McKee High School aims to prepare its students to meet the State standards for high academic achievement and the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. A range of career areas are available for the students such as cosmetology, automotive service, technology, architectural design, construction and graphic arts. These options enhance the Regents-level academic program. The majority of the teachers are fully licensed with approximately 50% having more than five years experience.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal has a very clear vision and provides strong leadership coupled with high expectations of her students and her staff.
- The school makes excellent use of a range of data to understand the performance and progress of all its students.
- The school provides a very wide range of academic and technical programs to meet the needs of all its students.
- The teachers work effectively in a collaborative way to ensure that students are given every opportunity to succeed.
- The school provides a wide range of enrichment activities, enabling the students to experience the wider world outside.
- The principal makes very good use of the budget to improve student outcomes.
- The school closely monitors attendance and acts promptly to trigger intervention.
- The assistant principals are a dynamic and focused team, actively engaged in raising expectations and leading professional development to meet student and teacher needs.
- The principal has hired staff with the capacity to maintain standards and continue with improvements.
- The principal and assistant principals frequently observe classes and provide high quality guidance for the improvement of classroom practice.

### What the school needs to improve

- Empower departments to take an even greater lead with goal setting and diagnostic assessments of progress at student, class and grade level.
- Review scheduling to accommodate common planning time for teachers.
- Involve teachers more in observations of each other's classrooms in order to share best practice and improve performance.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a well-developed school.**

Ralph McKee High School is a very good school with a welcoming, caring and inclusive environment providing a rich educational experience for the whole school community.

The principal has created a school where the staff feel valued and well supported, where students enjoy learning, and where parents are happy to send their children. The school motto is "Every Child a Graduate". This is just one indication of the principal's very strong values and her insistence on high standards. She is deeply committed to her students getting the best opportunities in their education and she has the full support of her skilled and dedicated staff in trying to achieve that goal. She works very closely with her administration and knows the individual strengths of her staff, so can support their development well. As a result of her leadership and the hard work of the staff, the school's effectiveness has increased significantly over the past five years.

For many years Ralph McKee High School did not perform as well as the other comprehensive high schools on Staten Island based on graduation data, Regents data, diplomas, college acceptance, and vocational training and job placements. In the past, the school has had a student profile which showed a majority deficient in mathematics and English, a third over-aged and high percentages of special education students. The school's performance has been on an upward trend for the last five years and a very high percentage of students are now graduating with Regents and Advanced Regents Diplomas. The school has many strengths, the key one being the detailed knowledge that is held about each student and the way in which data drives instruction. There is also good communication between school and home. Instruction is delivered through a range of academic and vocational programs which are carefully designed to ensure that students at all levels make progress. The students themselves are well mannered and articulate young people.

#### **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 well developed.**

The school has been collecting data systematically for many years in order to track the progress of its students, and this has had a clear impact on improving pupils' progress and the standards they reach. Data available on its performance in English language arts and math show an improvement every year since 2003-2004. The school has tracking data which shows clearly how they have been very successful in raising standards in both of these subjects within each grade. The longitudinal data shows significant progress being made by students between their points of entry at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade to the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

The school has also accurately analyzed the performance and progress of all ethnic groups based on the school report card. English language learners and special education

students receive extra support through academic intervention strategies and a varied program of instruction based on their identified needs. There is an effective special education support service which has helped considerably in improving the performance of that particular group of students.

The school is fully aware of how well it is doing in comparison with similar schools. It is unique on Staten Island and it has an academic success rate which has pushed it above a number of other high schools on the island. It has been particularly successful with helping its low achieving freshmen to make significant progress.

**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.**

Goals are first established with the incoming 9<sup>th</sup> grade students using the Kaplan Achievement Planner. Data is well reviewed for all other grade levels, then used to develop goals and supports such as double periods, Kaplan Regents Strategies, 3/2 splits, after school and tutorials so that students achieve high levels of success. The school has achieved adequate yearly progress in mathematics and English language arts for the last three years.

The very dynamic and focused team of assistant principals takes a clear lead in sharing data with their instructional teams. Each assistant principal is responsible for an instructional area of the school and they meet regularly with their teams and review data, setting medium and long term goals for all of the academic subjects. The assistant principals are also responsible for monitoring their own instructional area. As a result, all teachers are held accountable for their performance, while also being supported to continually improve. The special education classes receive their own highly appropriate program for certification.

High expectations are conveyed to students and parents or caregivers, who receive regular updates on student progress and are able to discuss that progress with teachers and the school leadership. Students and parents or caregivers therefore know how the student is progressing and what needs to be done to improve further.

Whilst this is a considerable strength of the school, a great deal of the lead work is undertaken by the assistant principals. The next stage is to focus on empowering the departments with setting goals and targets for improvement.

**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 is very good at aligning instructional programs to meet the needs of its students. There are very well planned instructional programs in mathematics for all grades of students, including double periods and 3/2 splits with living environment in the freshman year. In the sophomore year this includes a combination of single and double periods along with the Kaplan Advantage and Barron’s Regents books. In junior year there are separate pathways involving mathematics electives for both pass and fail Regents

students. The instructional programs for English language arts include separate pathways for students at all levels of performance across grades 9 through 12. This incorporates extra literacy and Kaplan Study Skills in grade 9, an in-depth literacy program and cross curricular work in grade 10, a study of the dramatic arts in their junior year and a combination of Regents review, college preparation and more advanced study in the senior year. Students in need of extra support receive individualized instructional programs managed by the guidance counselor. This wide selection of different pathways enables the school to provide each student with a focused learning plan which meets their needs and allows their learning to be appropriately accelerated.

Assistant principals meet with teachers regularly to discuss failure rates in classes and attendance patterns are monitored closely. Suitable action is taken according to what the data reveal.

The budget is spent mainly on instruction, with Title 1 funding helping to provide extra staffing and, importantly, the funding of a parents workshop. Extra technology resources have been purchased along with extra Regents materials and Kaplan resources. A number of curriculum ventures incorporating visits, such as to stage plays in Manhattan have also been funded. Technology is used widely in the classroom, with many classrooms having smart board facilities and access to computers, which allows students' programs to be enhanced or adapted. There are many curriculum packages in use such as United Streaming, Brain Pop, Net Trekker and Kaplan which also enhance differentiation.

McKee is a small school and the size is conducive to each student becoming known really well. The staff is prepared to rise to the challenge of teaching and the students are actively engaged in learning. Collaborative classes involving academic and vocational disciplines provide the curriculum with more meaning. Examples of this include the work of the mathematics department with construction and the English language arts with architecture and pre-engineering. Students enjoy the range of programs on offer and are motivated by the technical programs.

**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 staff is young and highly motivated, sharing the school's expectations and demonstrating a high level of commitment. The principal is aware of the strengths of each member of her staff and she has set out to hire the best teachers to further strengthen the school. Any weaknesses in her staff are monitored by a capable team of assistant principals, and an action plan for improvement is effectively implemented. The weakest teachers from previous years have since left and new teachers receive a supportive induction program.

The professional development program is driven by the principal and her assistant principals, with the purpose of it being to train teachers in new courses or in the use of new resources. For example, the mathematics assistant principal has led training in smart board work. The regular instructional group meetings also usually incorporate an aspect of training. Many teachers have been developing the use of differentiation in the classroom with the support of their managing assistant principal. However, at the moment there is no regular planning time for teachers to work with colleagues on a weekly basis.

Teacher observations take place regularly on both a formal and informal basis. The principal and her assistants are regularly visiting classrooms to monitor performance and to support teachers. Every teacher receives the mandatory formal observations and receives very thorough and supportive feedback. New teachers receive an induction package and are closely mentored. The principal respects and supports the teachers and all the staff enjoy being treated in a professional manner. The staff is contented and they enjoy working in the school. The school has no routines in place for inter-visitations by teachers to each other classes but has the capacity to set that up.

The school has good systems and structures, procedures are clear and the atmosphere is calm and purposeful, which supports the students' learning. There is a partnership with the community-based organization known as the New York Center for Interpersonal Development. This supports goals and objectives for the students through the "McKee after 3" program. With this program the students can receive homework help, Regents preparation classes, drama and chorus. Other partnerships the school has include Construction 2000, the Mass Transit Authority (MTA), community salons, Snug Harbor, Roundabout Theatre and First Robotics. There is an active parents group but it can occasionally be difficult to get high numbers of parents into 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 well developed.**

The principal and her assistant principals are constantly striving to raise standards and help them to meet their high expectations. The majority of decisions are reached collaboratively within the cabinet and always with the needs of the students in mind. Data drives instruction at Ralph McKee High School, where the staff has a thorough knowledge of student progress and engages in regular discussion about it.

The principal has a detailed Comprehensive Education Plan with action plans for its implementation and monitoring. It is a document which is used flexibly and guides improvement planning. Plans are revised when new information comes to light and student schedules are being continually re-evaluated. Currently, the drive for improvement and development is led by the leadership team so the next phase of development for the school may be to empower teachers at department level to set their own goals for their own subject areas.

The school is flexible in its approach to scheduling and learning is organized to respond to the needs of students. This is particularly effective in the support for special education students who receive an appropriate academic and vocational curriculum. The vast majority of students are challenged by the teaching on offer and the atmosphere in the school is very positive. The school acknowledges that the needs of its students must be catered for, and offers them a range of experiences to improve self esteem and achieve high academic performance.

The constant evaluation of student performance and the willingness of all the staff to modify student goals and plans where necessary make this school particularly successful

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Ralph R. McKee High School (HS 600)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.</b>	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>

\* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. 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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X