



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Riverdale Kingsbridge Academy**

**Middle School and High School 141**

**660 West 237<sup>th</sup> Street  
Bronx  
NY 10463**

**Principal: Daniella Phillips**

**Dates of review: May 7 – 9, 2007**

**Reviewer: Stephen Walker**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Riverdale Kingsbridge Academy (MS/HS 141) is a large middle and high school with 1,222 students enrolled in grades 6 through 12. In the year 2000, the school was reconfigured to become a middle school and a high school. It is located in the Riverdale neighborhood of the western section of the Bronx. The school population comes from a rich mixture of cultures with 49% Hispanic students, 25% White, 13% Black and 11% from Asian and other backgrounds. Over 8% of the students are recent arrivals from Dominican Republic, South Korea and Russia. Over 60 home languages other than English are spoken by the students. English language learners comprise 9% of the school population and special education students account for 13%. Over 34% of students are Title 1 eligible, which is less than similar schools and below the City average. Attendance, at 93%, is above the averages for similar and City schools.

Riverdale Kingsbridge was approved as an empowerment school in 2006. Empowerment schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, chose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paper work requirements.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The academic performance of students demonstrates significant improvements.
- The school has recently embraced empowerment status which introduces school-based improvements that are impacting on the progress and outcomes of students.
- The principal provides strong, reflective and collaborative school leadership which results in parents, staff and students greatly respecting her vision for the school.
- The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis, supported by committed teams of teachers and support staff.
- The positive culture in the school encourages a good standard of behavior and a real sense of student commitment and belonging to the school.
- Curriculum programs are developing well with an expanding range of core classes, electives and enrichment programs to meet the needs of the students.
- Good systems of guidance and pupil personnel support the academic performance and personal development of students.
- Attendance of students is well monitored and indicates a significant improvement on previous years.
- There are very effective partnerships with parents and community organizations who value the work of the school as a focal center of the community.

### What the school needs to improve

- Develop further the analysis of whole-school assessment data in order to identify any differences in the performance and progress of students by gender, ethnic groups, subjects and teachers.
- Continue to develop strategies to share good practice in teaching to improve further the quality of learning and student engagement across the school.
- Encourage further differentiation in classes through the use of assessment information, so that teachers address more closely the individual needs of students.
- Further develop a system based on previous performance, to set clear and measurable goals for individual students and subject areas.
- Ensure that all grade meetings are closely focused on student performance and the identification of underachievement.
- Improve further the monitoring, programs and services for special education and academic intervention students who require additional help with their work.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

The school demonstrates significant improvement in raising the academic performance of students in both the middle and high school grades. The school is beginning to analyze whole-school progress and performance data but this is not yet having a full impact on instruction or students' learning. Classroom assessment is beginning to identify the key strengths and weaknesses of individual students. The school works very closely with parents who greatly value the work of the school. Students who require additional help with their work are quickly identified, although the programs of intervention and monitoring arrangements are not fully effective. Curriculum programs are developing well with an expanding range of core classes, electives and enrichment programs to meet the needs of the students. There is a strong provision of sports and creative arts in the school. The positive culture in the school encourages a good standard of behavior and a real sense of student commitment and belonging to the school. The principal provides strong, reflective and collaborative school leadership, thus creating a very positive atmosphere among staff and students.

### 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 is developing systems to analyze performance data in order to improve the progress of students. Overall performance in State and City tests demonstrates a significant improvement over the past four years. The majority of students meet the graduation requirements and progress to college. The principal analyzes the achievement data, including the accountability reports and the annual school reports, to track differences in student performance between subjects and teachers. Individual student performance is analyzed through student progress reports and report cards in order to highlight underperformance. The school uses the Princeton Review tests as structured assessments for the students. The principal uses faculty days to encourage teachers to analyze the annual school report. There is a lack of consistency in how teachers assess student performance and informative research shows the varying differences in teacher assessed grades and the Regent examination results. The school does not fully analyze the grade differences between teachers and subjects.

Variations in student performance by gender or ethnic groups are acknowledged although there has been no detailed analysis of these differences across the grades and subjects. The school analyzes the ethnic representation in honors classes as part of the closing the achievement gap research. Systems are in place to record the performance and progress of English language learners and special education students. The school is beginning to compare performance with similar schools as this data is available through the empowerment network. The school has been innovative in some of its analysis of attendance and suspensions. It acknowledges that there are opportunities to interrogate

the assessment data further, with particular reference to differences in subjects, teachers, ethnic groups and gender.

**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.**

Records are kept on individual students for each of the subject areas. However, assessment by some teachers does not fully provide details of skill levels or strengths and weaknesses of individual students. Student progress is reviewed at regular grade meetings but teachers are not fully accountable to the assistant principals for the performance of their groups. Teachers encourage all students to succeed on their courses but students do not have clear and measurable goals that are based on previous performance. Classroom assessment is a regular feature of classes but it is not always an integral part of teaching and learning.

Academic intervention programs support students who require additional help with their work. The academic instruction support team meets once a week and identifies students who are scoring below grade levels. The school targets support in small groups for grade 7 and grade 9 students in sessions before school. Attendance at these sessions is low and the school is reviewing this service. The Riverdale Community Center provides an after-school program for middle school students who are identified as requiring additional support through the interim and final grades. Struggling readers are supported through the Wilson and Great Leaps reading programs. Identification of students who need extra support is good but the monitoring, programs and services for special education and academic intervention students are not fully effective.

Communication with the parents is good and this helps student achievement. The school is gaining support with the translation of letters for non-English speaking parents and is seeking more voluntary interpreters to work with parents. Parents and caregivers are provided with regular progress reports that are detailed and informative. Attendance at parent-teacher conferences is good and parents are alerted quickly if their child is having learning difficulties. The school’s goals and plans for improving student performance and progress are important for all members of the school community.

**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.**

Curriculum programs meet mandatory requirements and are clearly focused on raising the academic performance of students. The school uses empowerment status to adopt a more flexible approach to courses. Honors courses in earth science, mathematics and Spanish are taught to high-achieving grade 8 students and Latin is taught to all grade 6 students to improve their vocabulary and grammar development. There are individualized programs in the high school with a variety of electives, Advanced Placement courses and College Now courses. Highly relevant programs have been introduced to meet the needs of specific groups of students, such as English language learners. In a number of classes,

groups and work is organized according to the strengths of individual students. Teachers are held accountable for the outcomes of their students. However, in many classes the lesson is teacher dominated and performance data is not used well to differentiate activity.

The assignment of teachers and the scheduling of classes are clearly guided by the drive to improve student performance. Grade teams are selected on the strengths of individual staff and teachers are used for push-in and pull-out intervention depending on their support skills. Budgeting decisions are clearly impacting on improving students' performance. Specific additional grants have been used well to provide additional staffing for advanced placement classes as well as supporting the improvement in attendance through a parent coordinator and alternative student programs.

Many of the instructional programs actively engage students including the musical production of Pippins, the exchange visit to Maine and the numerous sports and creative arts activities. Many teachers are good practitioners and students demonstrate high levels of concentration and attention. Students enjoy their time at the school and take part in a number of additional activities. Some teachers are now using smart boards but there are opportunities to further develop further the use of technology as a tool for teaching and learning.

Good systems of guidance and pupil personnel support the academic performance and personal development of students. There are very good relationships between students and adults. Students speak highly of the support and guidance from teachers and counselors. Attendance of students is well monitored and demonstrates a significant improvement on previous years. Positive strategies are in place throughout the school to encourage and reward good 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 proficient.**

The principal provides strong, reflective and collaborative school leadership. Parents, staff and students greatly respect her focused vision for the school. She maintains an important presence round the school and her enabling and optimistic approach encourages staff to take an active part in the school. She is well supported by a professional cabinet team who support the continuous improvements in the school.

Staff are selected on their potential to use data to set high expectations for student performance. The quality of recent appointments is high and includes a significant number of forward looking Peace Corps teachers. Contracts for underperforming teachers are discontinued. The school is developing a program of professional development that is clearly focusing on teachers' needs and accelerating student progress. New teachers receive ongoing support through coaching and mentoring. The school acknowledges the importance of sharing good practice in teaching in order to improve further the quality of learning and student engagement across the school.

Lesson observations are well established and all teachers have a formal observation by the assistant principals with feedback at least once per year. Regular learning walks are greatly valued by the teachers. The number of inter-visitations between colleagues to share good classroom practice is limited. Teams within the school such as the cabinet, school safety committee and grade teams meet regularly to evaluate and review plans.

Grade meetings are not always closely focused on student performance and the identification of underachievement. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis, supported by committed teams of teachers and support staff. Expectations and procedures are clear and reasonable. The positive culture in the school encourages a good standard of behavior and a real sense of student commitment and belonging to the school. There are occasional disturbances from the network suspension center.

There are very effective partnerships with parents and community organizations who really value the work of the school as a focal center of the community. The partnership with Riverdale Mental Health Association provides targeted counseling support for girls in grades 8 and 9. Strong links with arts organizations and numerous commercial organizations help the school achieve its academic goals.

**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.**

The school is increasingly evaluating its performance and seeking new ways to improve further the learning and progress of the students. Staff are encouraged to be involved in evaluation, planning and discussions on school improvement through grade, subject and faculty meetings. Students express their views through the student government and organization. Clear priorities within the Comprehensive Education Plan are agreed and shared with the subject teams. Targets do not always have clear, measurable success criteria that are related to student progress and performance. The school leadership team has a good understanding of the plan although it is not fully engaged in the monitoring and evaluation of the targets. Some school plans do not have a clear focus on improving student progress. For example, it is not clear how the analysis of the empowerment target group in grade 9 has had an impact on instruction or on learning in the classroom.

Assessment systems are not fully developed in all the subjects to ensure that student progress can be monitored and evaluated across the school and between classes. Individual progress is monitored through grade meetings and parents are alerted if grades are unsatisfactory. Students who need extra support are identified but intervention strategies are not always clearly implemented. However, good practice exists in grade 6 where assessment data is utilized collaboratively to measure the progress of intervention strategies. Teachers generally are not fully analyzing assessments in order to drive their teaching plans, groupings and instruction.

The principal's whole-school self-evaluation is robust and clearly identifies key areas for development. Staff are encouraged to review practices and adjust strategies. For example, the school is revising its academic intervention so that there is a more effective service for targeted grade 7 and grade 9 students.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Riverdale Kingsbridge Academy (MS/HS 141)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<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>		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"> <li>ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>		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"> <li>all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<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.	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<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	