



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Captain Manuel Rivera School

Public /Middle School 279

2100 Walton Avenue

Bronx

NY 10453

Principal: James Waslawski

Dates of review: February 26 - 28, 2007

Reviewer: Peter Lewis

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Captain Manuel Rivera School provides an education for just over 1000 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population is made up of 20% Black, 73% Hispanic and 7% Asian and other students. Thirty percent are English language learners and 20% are special education students. Attendance, at 92%, has remained relatively constant over the past three years at a level that is slightly above that of similar and City schools. The school receives Title 1 funding.

The school has successfully applied to join the first year of the Empowerment Schools initiative. 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, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements. This school is currently engaged in a research project to design its own periodic assessment materials.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has a very clear vision for the school's development which has secured improvements in students' learning.
- Strengths in leadership have had a positive impact on the introduction of new initiatives, particularly in grades 3, 4, and 5.
- Very good teaching interests students and promotes rapid learning.
- Special education students and those who are English language learners are well supported and so make good progress.
- A strong culture of collaboration and teamwork is successfully being built and is particularly strong in those parts of the school where leadership is effective.
- Students are well motivated and know that their teachers have their best interests at heart.
- Parents know that the school helps their children to learn and value the information with which they are provided.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish a realistic action plan with interim milestones to evaluate the progress towards each goal's achievement.
- Review the roles and accountabilities of the assistant principals in relation to their contribution to evaluation and subsequent action planning.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the existing house structure.
- Ensure that differentiated instruction is consistent in all lessons and provides challenge for higher-attaining students.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Since the principal's appointment in the summer of 2004, his strong focus on ensuring a consistently high quality of teaching and learning has resulted in considerable improvement. The school has collected and analyzed an appropriate range of assessment data which has given it a clear picture of the patterns of student performance in the different classes and grades. It has made a good start in using this information to plan for improvement although, at present, this lacks sufficient detail to enable the school to track its progress sufficiently well.

Relationships and teamwork, particularly in grades 3 through 5, are good because of the level of discussion and evaluation that has been established, and because of the high expectations of students and staff that are modeled well by the principal. Consequently, staff increasingly share the principal's vision of what can be achieved.

The school has identified the need to improve student learning further through planning lessons more effectively targeted at students' different needs and has made a good start in establishing consistency in this. Students are confident and articulate and, particularly when they are taught well, are well-motivated. The school has recognized that there are too many occasions when lessons fail to stimulate or challenge students, particularly those with higher achievement.

In general, however, students enjoy coming to school and collaborate well in those lessons where opportunities are planned to enable them to do so. Parents particularly like the degree to which the principal and other staff are readily accessible and welcoming, and ready to take swift action to address any problems.

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 has placed considerable emphasis on collating and analyzing student assessment information and building a clear picture of attainment in subjects and across grades. Information held centrally and at classroom level has enabled the administration to move rapidly to a point where it clearly understands the comparative progress of most of its students in mathematics and, to a slightly lesser extent, in reading and writing. This has been particularly successful in focusing interventions which have had a positive impact on the progress made by English language learners and special education students. At the same time a good understanding of the impact that teachers have on student learning, informed by student achievement data, has enabled the school to focus more on capitalizing on teachers' strengths when allocating classes and groups.

The school is good at using assessment data to help it in moving students from, for example, level 1 to level 2, and level 2 to level 3. This focus on the lower end of the

achievement profile, and on special education and English language learner students, has resulted in many of these students making good progress, particularly in reading. However, the school understands that more is now needed in relation to the identification of the progress made by higher-attaining students.

The school's use of assessment information has developed well in English language arts and mathematics, particularly in the lower grades. English and social studies, and mathematics and science are taught in parallel in the older grades which goes some way towards strengthening assessment practice in these subjects. The school is aware that more remains to be done, for example in understanding the progress made by 8th grade students and to establish greater consistency in the support provided for English language learners. Good and appropriate plans are in place to develop and refine assessment practice in science and social studies.

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.

Although the school has made considerable progress in its use of data to plan for continuing improvement, it recognizes that more work is needed to ensure consistency across grades. A wide range of assessment information has now been established and has begun to be used to good effect in setting goals for individual students. Clear emphasis has been placed on the development of periodic assessments, which have the potential to enable teachers to plan interventions accurately and to track students' progress more accurately. This is particularly important in relation to the school's ability to meet the needs of higher-attaining students who, too frequently, work on the same tasks as their peers.

While what the school describes as a "precipitous decline" in the achievement of some students in grades 6, 7, and 8, for example, has been recognized, there is no detailed plan in place to address this issue. At the same time, the principal has perceptively recognized that, in practice, the school's existing house structure works against the continuity that has been successfully established, particularly in grades 3 through 5. Informal plans have begun to be put in place, which have the potential to address this issue. Goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan are based on the need to raise achievement, and are measurable. However, they lack interim milestones by which progress towards them can accurately be assessed.

The principal works in collaboration with teachers in evaluating the school's work and in planning for improvement. Consequently, although there remains some resistance to change, staff are increasingly involved in identifying success and in securing improvement. High expectations are clearly modeled through these meetings, and this has helped the school in raising teachers' expectations of themselves and of their students. Special education students are well supported through plans which focus on their needs. Expectations are high and teaching and individual education plans identify the small steps needed to ensure progress. Regular meetings involving teachers and support staff provide information that parents say helps them in knowing how well their children are doing and how they can help.

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.

Recent and ongoing modifications to the curriculum have ensured alignment with State standards and demonstrate the school's increasing ability to identify curriculum development needs from student achievement data. The current move away from the Everyday Mathematics program towards Technical Education Research Center investigations in grades kindergarten through 5, for example, reflect the school's concern that developments in establishing a fully standards-based curriculum should be supported by the resources. The budget has been well used in this, as in the good use that has been made of an external consultant in strengthening the use of assessment in English language arts. Scheduling and staffing decisions are now increasingly driven by needs identified by assessment data which reflect the principal's very high expectations of his staff and students.

The appointment of three lead teachers in order to establish support for curriculum development and teachers' use of data has begun to secure success. The school recognizes that more still remains to be done in this and the role of lead teachers and coaches at grade meetings is a key component in developing teachers' confidence, understanding and, therefore, accountability. However, the school recognizes that this work is hampered, to a degree, by the established house structure which now can inhibit communication across phases and continuity in learning. This is reflected in different rates of development in which, for example, the history and geography components of social studies are taught separately in 5th and 6th grade, but not elsewhere.

Differentiated teaching and learning are not yet consistent practice across the school. The best lessons are well planned in relation to a clear statement of what students will learn. In these, the good range of activities and focused interventions by the teacher fully engage students who eagerly describe what they are doing and why. In contrast, there remain too many instances where the slow pace of lessons and lack of challenge in the tasks that are set leads to instances of low level disruption from students who say that they are sometimes bored. This is made worse when tasks are set at the same level for all students, with little acknowledgement of different performance levels or learning styles.

As a result, although most students know that any difficulties that they encounter will be dealt with well by their teachers, this is not yet consistent across the school. Attendance is monitored carefully, and appropriate action taken when necessary.

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.

As a result of improvements in the school's understanding and use of data, particularly at senior levels, the strong emphasis of professional development is increasingly planned to address needs revealed by the analysis of students' achievement. In considering the appointment and allocation of staff, the principal demonstrates his high expectations and well-developed understanding of teachers' strengths in deciding where their skills can best be utilized. This includes their ability to use data.

The school's understanding of its effectiveness is increasingly derived from the discussions that take place following monitoring activities. The involvement of lead teachers and coaches in these allows interventions and development to be planned and targeted appropriately. Teachers value the support provided by lead teachers and coaches, and describe the degree to which opportunities to observe each others' practice within and across grades has begun to establish a shared understanding of practice. This enables staff to feel more involved in the school's development, although the principal recognizes that a closer link between planned improvements and monitoring activities has the potential to involve staff to a more effective degree. In this, the school recognizes that the roles of assistant principals are too narrowly focused within the house structure and that this restricts their whole-school and strategic view. There is a need to further refine their skills of monitoring and evaluation. This is well developed in grades 3 to 5, where strong elements of teamwork are apparent as a result.

The principal is respected by staff, students and parents for his high expectations and ability to take difficult decisions. This is enhanced by his availability and willingness to listen to a range of views. Staff acknowledge the clear systems that have been put in place so that the school runs smoothly.

The principal's knowledge of the needs of special education and students who are English language learners is valued in the way that he has ensured a good liaison with external agencies in planning successful interventions.

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

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

Since the principal's appointment, there is clear evidence of improvement in the school's ability to analyze its performance and to plan for improvement. His evaluation of the effectiveness of different aspects of the school's work, although very recently introduced, is honest and accurate. The school has ensured that its planning for improvement is comprehensive and that it makes increasingly good use of a recently-established range of assessment data in identifying areas which require further development. However, the initiatives that have been identified, in following the format of the mandated Comprehensive Education Plan, are both too many in number and too broad. As a result, and because whole-school goals do not yet include interim targets, the school has difficulty in assessing the rate of progress made towards meeting planned objectives.

The principal has established a good understanding of student achievement across the school, within and across grades. This information has been used effectively in beginning to match the curriculum and instruction more closely to students' needs. At present, however, this relies too closely on the support of senior staff and, particularly of lead teachers. The school recognizes that more could be done through, for example, the increased use of ongoing teacher assessment, to refine this process. At the same time, the outline plans that exist for broadening the roles of assistant principals have the potential to enhance the school's monitoring activities with a strengthened whole-school focus.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Captain Manuel Rivera School (PS/MS 279)	∅	✓	+
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		