



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community
Research**

Public School 332

**916 Eagle Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Sharif Rucker

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Reviewer: Alvin Jeffs

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research is a new school, having opened in September 2006. It currently has 101 students who comprise the ninth grade of what will be a four-year high school. The school is located in the Bronx in a temporary building. It will re-locate to a larger site in September.

The ethnic make-up of the school is 60% Hispanic students and 40% Black. Fourteen of the current population are special education students with individual education plans and 15 are English language learners.

91% the students have Title 1 eligibility, which is a higher proportion than in similar schools and higher than the average for City schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school provides an interesting and relevant education within a caring and supportive setting.
- The advisory system within the school is very effective in counseling and supporting all students.
- Data is well used to identify students with additional needs and those whose progress begins to diminish.
- Students testify that they are full partners in their own learning programs.
- Those parents who become involved with the school attest to its openness, care and respect for their children.
- The principal has developed very effective routines and procedures in a short space of time.
- The teaching staff engages students well and work in an impressively collaborative way.
- The school is beginning to use data effectively to monitor student progress.
- The strong core curriculum is enriched by many arts and performance opportunities.
- Attendance is good as the result of prompt and effective procedures.

What the school needs to improve

- Assist teachers in further differentiating work and setting student targets within their lessons.
- Broaden the data analysis to evaluate the progress of all sub-groups within the school.
- Further develop the support of special education students and monitor their progress in more detail.
- Develop a detailed school action plan that builds on the academic outcomes of the current year and sets challenging targets for 2007 – 2008.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

This school has made outstanding progress in the nine months of its existence. It has set up effective systems to monitor the progress of each of its students, and established efficient procedures for all aspects of day-to-day working. The effective team work and collaborative style within its small teaching and guidance staff are key elements within its initial success.

There is a sharp focus on preparation for college. To this end the principal is now developing a program of internships which will give students the opportunity to experience work settings in a rigorous and assessed way.

The core of this staff comprises four teaching fellows, new to teaching, but exceptionally well motivated and committed to the students. They, together with a highly experienced counselor and a few other part-time staff, have been responsible for this year's good academic progress. The advisory system is very supportive and there is a good range of additional activities that enrich the curriculum and support students who require additional teaching.

The principal is largely responsible for ensuring that this new school is already proficient in most areas of its work. He has a clear vision for the school and is open to students, staff and parents. He has been tireless in setting up efficient ways of working.

Students and parents are aware that this school is special and that it shows empathy for the students, many of whom have been previously unsuccessful in larger schools.

Not surprisingly, there are still areas of the school's work that need developing. Strategic planning has been good, laying a sound basis for the future high school, but the next stage is to develop a detailed action plan that sets clear and measurable targets for the school's growth. In addition, the very good professional development program that has assisted staff through this year needs to continue its focus on using student data to plan lessons and set measurable student targets. Both of these factors are within the school's planning for 2007 – 08.

The school is an Institute for Student Achievement School. The Institute exists to develop small learning communities that "...create and sustain intellectually rigorous and caring, personalized environments" This is a good description of the vision of this school. The developing curriculum is addressing academic rigor in students who may often be disaffected by the standard education process.

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.

Within its short existence the school has assembled a lot of information into a worthwhile student database. This database has developed effectively even though some student information is not available, or available too late to be useful in setting baselines. To overcome this problem, teachers developed and implemented their own internal diagnostic assessments which were then supplemented with Princeton Review and other test analyses. This has given all staff a very clear picture of all students, their attendance patterns and learning profiles.

Although no comparisons have been made between performances of different ethnic sub-groups, the school is starting to use the new regional database to make useful comparisons between other sub-groups within the school. Considerable work has been carried out to identify and monitor English language learners and, on the basis of the information gathered, a specialized second language teacher has been appointed. The counselor, who, like the principal, has a special education qualification, currently has responsibility for individual education plans. Arrangements for reviewing these and providing staff with clear targets are good, but the lack of a specialist resource teacher means that there is still more to do to evaluate the progress of these students.

A good culture has developed that places a high value on using data as a basis for taking action. One specific instance is impressive. Within one of the four classes the review data relating to achievement according to gender highlighted significantly lower achievements for boys than girls. The hypothesis that this related to the age and energy of the students led the school to set up an excellent drama workshop for these boys with professional actors. The students confirm that this initiative diffused some of their anger and angst. As a result, both attendance and performance have improved.

As a small new school, there has been little opportunity to make comparisons with similar establishments and none to compare previous performance.

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.

Collaboration between staff is excellent and much of it is based upon the use of assessment data, work samples and observations to develop class lesson plans and responses to individual students' needs.

This strong focus on individual students is also linked to the general progress of the classes and groupings within the school. There are regular case conferences, which look at four particular students, and these give staff the opportunity to agree ways forward for these individuals, but at the same time to analyze how well, for example, the English or mathematics rubrics are working.

Staff have placed a particular emphasis on those students whose performance gives cause for concern. Coming to the end of the first year, the school is very clear that great majority of its students have made at least one level progress.

The school's stated vision includes the belief that "high expectations lead students to college" and this underlies all of the work with students and parents. Both of these groups confirm that staff have the highest expectations of the students. The drive for improved achievement, the gaining of credits and the development of appropriately efficient work habits is the basis of the regular teacher and student conferences as well as the discussions between teachers and parents. The rueful "He does not get away with anything now" together with "He knows what he has to do" emphasizes the parents' view that, often for the first time, "someone really knows them and really cares".

There is no doubt that staff have a rigor and involvement with students seeking the best possible progress for each one. This commitment is tangible, but still has some way to go before it is fully translated into the setting of measurable and demanding goals at an individual level.

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.

Students respect their teachers. They are engaged with lessons and express appreciation for the commitment and effectiveness of the teaching and advisory, or counseling, support they receive. They feel safe and secure and, above all, respected. They know that the adults can be approached with any problem and that "they will sort it".

There is a rich curriculum, with a strong emphasis on literacy. This has been selected and adapted to suit the students, many of whom in the past lost confidence in their own abilities. In addition, there are good opportunities in art and drama. There is a good program of visits including one to Broadway and a highly successful trip to Washington from which students gained a significant amount in terms of greater awareness of the world. This dual emphasis on literacy and the wider world is particularly appropriate to this group of students and re-kindles their self-worth and motivation.

Teachers know they are accountable for student progress. Their work is well supported by classroom observations by senior staff, followed with exemplary feedback in written and verbal forms. Inter-visitation between classes and the strong involvement by coaches and mentors means that this group of new staff have developed extremely well over the past nine months.

The principal has been particularly effective in aligning budget, schedules and recruitment to develop capacity within the curriculum. As a result, an English second language teacher, drama and art tutors have been appointed, money has been found to finance wireless laptops and schedules adjusted to incorporate the drama sessions for the group of under-achieving boys.

Attendance is also a very high priority. Parents attest to the fact that "If my son is not in school they are on the phone immediately". The attendance rate has moved from 63% at the start of the year to just below 90%. The school sees this as still too low, but has put in

place many reward and celebration procedures that emphasize the importance of attendance within the graduation process.

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 school has found recruitment difficult, but has adopted a rigorous approach, seeking only staff who are flexible, computer literate and able to work collaboratively. It has also released staff where standards were not upheld. Everyone is now involved in the appointment of staff and the shared vision means that teachers appointed for September are clear about their role and what the school seeks to achieve.

In all areas, the principal has worked hard to maintain the highest possible standards. There are comprehensive procedures for every eventuality and excellent support and advice to ensure consistency in dealing with attendance and promptness. Not surprisingly, the principal is held in the highest esteem. Staff and students see him as an excellent role model, while parents appreciate his 'hands on' approach and the fact that he is always there for them.

The professional development program has been very good, with sessions relating to classroom management, behavior strategies, information technology and the use of data in planning. This has led to an openness where all staff feel they can share problems and ideas, consequently learning well from each other. The small size of the school lends itself well to this and a remarkable cohesiveness has developed. There is strong collaboration around lesson planning, developing programs for students and setting up additional activities such as Saturday morning sessions. This has assisted in the development of a good advisory system that sees each teacher 'being there' for fifteen students. Communication and cooperation are very high between staff and between staff and students.

Many good partnerships are developing. There are very good links with local youth clubs, Columbia University, the Bronx Ensemble and the many consultants from the region, Princeton and elsewhere. In addition, the limitations of support services have been overcome by access to a psychologist from a neighboring school and a special education teacher who now works part-time within 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 undeveloped.

The development of the case conference format has seen good practice develop around the discussion of student progress and the implementation of goals for students and departments. Item analysis work has informed the emphasis on literacy skills within mathematics and the English department has regular discussions relating to the appropriateness of texts and teaching activities.

Not surprisingly, the hectic pace of the first nine months has meant that time has not been found for a formal approach to goal-setting and review for whole-school initiatives. There are, however, clear indications that the school has the required skills and motivation to develop targets for strategic developments over the coming year.

Last September the principal set out with four major goals. These were to see all students attend and achieve at least one grade's progress, the development of an effective literacy curriculum incorporating two major essay formats and support set up for special education and second language students. It has reviewed these and is happy that they have developed well. In terms of 85% one-grade improvement and nearly 90% attendance there has been clear measurable data. For other areas the school has relied on its excellent communication and its ability to share developments with parents as its main review tools. There is clarity about what needs to be done next in these areas, within each subject department and in measuring the nature of the progress achieved.

At present the school does not have a formalized action plan process or format and is in the process of identifying goals, review points and responsibilities for the coming academic year. The principal is receiving good support in this process from an ex-principal mentor and an experienced staff development assistant principal. Above all he has laid a very sound basis from which the new high school should develop in a planned and reflective way.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research (PS 332)	∅	✓	+
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		