



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Ron Brown Academy / Whitelaw Reid

Middle School 57

**125 Stuyvesant Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11221**

Principal: Celeste Douglas

Dates of review: March 19 - 20, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Corinne Brown

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Ron Brown Academy / Whitelaw Reid is a middle school with 285 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 80% Black, 18% Hispanic, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 85.6%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 94% eligibility.

The school changed its name under the previous principal, but this was not formalized. It is known as the Ron Brown Academy in the community. The current principal is in her second year as principal of this school. The English as a second language teacher is shared with the other school in the building. Facilities such as the auditorium, gym and cafeteria are also shared. There is some transience in the student population as parents relocate to seek work.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a well respected leader who sets the nurturing tone in the building, has a clear sense of purpose and is accessible to all.
- The administration work cohesively to support and empower staff in collaborating to raise student achievement.
- The school uses multiple data sources well to understand school and student performance and progress.
- Timely interventions enable students in need to make very good progress.
- The school supports students effectively to meet its high expectations for learning and behavior.
- Teachers are enthusiastic, dedicated and plan interesting lessons together that students enjoy.
- Parents and students feel the school is a safe place where everyone is known, heard and valued.
- Clear, well-defined goals drive the school, inform all levels of planning and are continually revisited.
- Professional development is thorough and ongoing to meet student and teacher needs as well as school priorities.
- Strong systems and effective partnerships contribute significantly to the development of students' social, emotional and academic skills.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine and synthesize tracking systems so that all staff access data at a single point and routinely use this in planning.
- Continue to seek greater involvement of parents in the life of the school.
- Sharpen the process by which students set their own goals so that they are always specific and measurable.
- Deepen instructional planning so that all lessons address multiple intelligences through varied tasks, including homework, and questioning that develops higher order thinking skills.
- Explore opportunities to infuse the arts across the curriculum further.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

This small school quotes and lives the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” as all staff work together to develop the student holistically. It has made significant strides in raising overall achievement, in math and English language arts especially, since the appointment of the principal in the fall of 2006. A wide range of data is used well across the school to understand performance and progress and inform planning at all levels. Teachers receive ongoing support to increase confidence, particularly as new systems come online. Currently there are several data collections systems in use across the school, which is not always efficient of staff time.

There is an excellent team spirit among staff. They set goals collaboratively that are congruent, clear and revisited at periodic intervals. Parents know the school goals and communication flows. Attendance at student-centered events such as parent-teacher conferences is good and increasing. Not enough parents currently commit to participate more fully in school life. Groups of students are well served through comprehensive processes which identify need and effect timely interventions. Teachers show enthusiasm so lessons are interesting and students make personal connections. Differentiation is evident in lessons. One school focus is to deepen lesson planning using data and so personalize learning further. The arts are not sufficiently represented in the curriculum. Students feel safe and that adults care for them. They feel they have adults with whom they can talk. Students set goals for themselves which are generally clear, but some are difficult to monitor as they not sufficiently specific. Rigorous systems mean that attendance and behavior is now very good and the positive trend continues. Partners and support services are an integral part of the whole student approach that is showing good impact across the school. The school is honest and open. It knows how far it has come and that the journey continues. Plans and data are interlinked, with flexible response to changing circumstances. The community shares and lives the vision of “Excellence without excuses.”

The school has made good progress in meeting the recommendations of the previous Quality Review. Some resulting initiatives continue to be high profile, such as differentiation, improvement of achievement and increased parental participation. Increased extra-curricular opportunities and integration of technology are underway. The inquiry team is working efficiently and has identified its target group within grade 6 and 7, with a focus on comprehension skills. The SMARTS (Students Moving, Achieving and Reaching True Success) action research program is well documented and information is shared with all staff.

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 the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

All staff are aware of the importance of data so multiple sources are collected to understand performance and progress. As well as external data, such as formal test results, the school uses its own assessments and informal tests to build a comprehensive picture of students. All grade 6 students are screened on entry to ensure that needs are promptly identified and suitable interventions are swiftly implemented. Professional expertise, using detailed knowledge of students and personal factors that might affect performance, complements the battery of information. Assessments are regular and results cross-referenced to note trends or patterns. Special education students have the same benchmarks as general education students, but their progress is monitored even more closely to good effect. Since September 2008 all of these students have improved at least one level. Similar scrutiny of English language learners and effective action shows they too make good progress, with two students testing out of the program completely.

The school examines data by ethnicity and gender but notes no major discrepancies at present in performance or progress. It pays particular attention to over-age students who were held over prior to this school. Their numbers are now significantly reduced as a result of incentives and programs. The school now has an honors program for higher achieving students. It is sensitive to social circumstances that may affect learning and is setting up a program for those students with similar family issues.

The Ron Brown Academy is particularly careful to compare its performance over time and across grades, classrooms and subjects. It has improved its math results by 7% and English language arts by 6% so far this year. It has strong links with other schools, makes comparisons, visitations and shares best practices. Training in the use of data is ongoing and based largely on individual need. Staff were all trained in the new Acuity program on a rolling basis, with key staff in the first phase. There are several data systems in use within the school that together give comprehensive coverage. As a result, access and manipulation of data is not simple and efficient for all staff.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The clear goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan align with the principal's performance review. Deriving from these goals, teachers are empowered and collaborate to create grade, class and student goals. Coaches ensure congruence. All goals are specific and have inbuilt timescales and checkpoints. Progress is carefully monitored after each assessment so that adjustments to programs or instruction occur. Analysis shows that most students have particular difficulties in basic math operations and reading fluency. Programs and initiatives to rectify this across the school are showing positive effect. The school focuses on students making connections. The visit by an author of fiction based on social issues is clearly motivating students to read more. The school pays particular

attention to students with low levels in math and English language arts. Interventions and programs such as Saturday school, Read 180 and the Wilson program are successful. In two months, a small group working with the literacy coach showed gains of 5% to 25%. The school works strenuously to address the needs of its transient population.

Whole school goals are prominently displayed. Students and parents know what the goals are when asked. High expectations for achievement and behavior are reinforced through frequent communication with parents and students and firm boundaries, such as adherence to the dress code. Parents of students who have particular services or interventions receive monthly reports. Open communication with increased workshops and opportunities for parents means that attendance at parent teacher conferences has risen dramatically. Attendance at student-centered events is good, but not enough parents are involved in the life of the school to represent the full community.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school’s standards based curriculum is carefully customized to fit its student population. A balanced literacy workshop model based on modified Teachers College gives good structure and assessment data within English language arts. The math faculty has similarly adapted the “applications and concepts” text to include a pacing calendar and assessments that meet school needs. Within the context of these approaches, students reflect and set their own goals. The majority are specific and measurable. However, it is difficult for students to measure progress when goals are not quantifiable. Although the curriculum is enhanced by dance and band, there is not sufficient exposure to the arts, limiting alternative ways of experiencing success. Extra-curricular opportunities are expanding and currently include technology, martial arts, basketball and dance.

Teachers are committed and hold themselves fully accountable for student progress. There is rigorous reference to all types of data in common planning, preparation periods and team meetings. This results in instruction that is differentiated by capability and skills groupings, so students find lessons interesting and engaging. Tasks and outcomes sometimes vary for different groups. Not all lessons address multiple intelligences, use questioning to elicit higher order thinking or give differentiated homework tasks, so that student are sufficiently challenged. Relationships throughout the school are respectful. Students have an adult they trust to whom they will talk. School is a safe place where they are heard and valued.

The school budget is skillfully used to help achieve whole school goals. The appointment of a lead teacher for English language arts complements the skills of the literacy coach to give even greater support to faculty. Staff acknowledge that the principal works tirelessly to facilitate improvements for students. One commented, “She’s a hustler...she finds ways to make things happen for these kids.” The schedule is carefully constructed so that mutually supportive teachers have concurrent preparation periods to enable sharing of best practices. Stringent systems and comprehensive support are in place to ensure that student attendance is seen as high priority in the school community. Attendance has improved by over 5%, so the school is more than on track to meet its own attendance goal this year.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The principal, assistant principal and coaches are highly visible throughout the school. Classroom visits, informal observations and data are used constructively to derive individual action plans for professional development. The instructional team has a three tiered support approach based on differing teacher needs. Faculty is exposed to whole school intensives such as differentiated instruction, but this is then tailored to ongoing needs. Evident differentiation to varying degrees in classrooms shows that professional development is effective. New teachers are welcomed and carefully mentored to become part of the school community. Many teachers are relatively inexperienced so time is required for skills and confidence to be honed. There is strong collegiality and trust among staff, with frequent visits to each others' classrooms. Grade 6 teachers have devised their own rubric to conduct peer observations. Such visits and initiatives are actively encouraged by the administration.

Strong and significant partnerships, such as "Counseling in Schools", support student holistic growth. The pupil personnel team comprises service providers, partners and staff who discuss, act and follow up individual students. Effective programs such as "Opportunities" and "Diamonds" overseen by the behavior intervention team have resulted in a marked decrease in suspensions, leading to an orderly environment with clearly understood routines and systems.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The success of students in all aspects of their lives underpins the work of this caring school. The principal is an effective leader who models self-discipline, warmth and a sense of purpose for staff and students. She conducts workshops for students who experience failure at whatever level. As well as formalized support from guidance and service providers, many staff informally mentor students so their attitudes become positive. Whole school plans dovetail with student and teacher needs. Academic aspirations for students are high. Rigorous goals for improvement in core areas such as attendance, math and English language arts have inbuilt checkpoints to monitor progression. The school is very adept at planning for both student and teacher improved outcomes. The majority of classes have met or exceeded mid-year interim goals in English language arts. In house and external assessments inform adjustment to plans. Increased writing components in math were scaled back when they proved counter-productive.

The school plans carefully so that improvements continue. It has rationalized the number of tests given to students so they are more meaningful indicators. Each year's goals are based on the experience and relevance of the previous year's goals. The school is in a good position, with systems and strong people in place, to continue its recent significant growth. It continually reflects to make real its vision of high quality education for all.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Ron Brown Academy / Whitelaw Reid	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score				X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?				X	
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?				X	
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X	

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?				X	
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?				X	
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?				X	
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?			X		
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?			X		
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?				X	
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X		

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?				X	
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?				X	
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					X

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped