



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Rafael Cordero School

Middle School 302

**350 Linwood Street
Brooklyn
NY 11208**

Principal: Lisa Linder

Dates of review: May 29 – 30, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Ann Marie Lettieri-Baker

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well
What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review
Overall evaluation
How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Rafael Cordero School is a middle school with 1021 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 33% Black, 61% Hispanic, 1% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 19% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 87%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 95% eligibility.

This school shares space with Community School 89, a small kindergarten through grade 8 school. The principal began at Rafael Cordero School in August 2007.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The new principal is a dynamic leader who conveys a very strong sense of school community and high expectations that are shared by all staff.
- The school has established systems that provide a calm and safe learning environment for all students.
- The administration and teaching staff analyze a range of data to track student progress in English language arts and math and to identify trends over time.
- Teachers work with students to set objectively measurable goals for improvement which are aligned to performance data.
- The school has established structures for monitoring poor attendance and celebrating both exemplary and improved attendance.
- Technology is used well by teachers to enhance lessons and strengthen student engagement.
- The after school program provides opportunities for students to refine their academic skills and to engage in a variety of enrichment experiences.
- Parents feel welcome in the school and know the school has high expectations for their children.
- Effective interventions and support services work collaboratively to provide support for special education students and English language learners.
- Displays of students' high quality academic and artwork throughout the school reflect their enjoyment in, and commitment to, learning.
- Effective comparisons to other schools has improved student academic performance.

What the school needs to improve

- Institute procedures for setting objectively measurable professional development goals for teachers and whole school initiatives.
- Use the established rubrics in reading, writing and math to facilitate student self-assessment and to develop peer assessment opportunities.
- Ensure that teachers use the periodic assessments consistently to plan differentiated tasks to better meet student's individual needs.
- Regularly provide parents and caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's performance.
- Improve instruction and organization of groups and align the English language arts curriculum on each grade level to match interim data to New York State expectations.

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.

“My expectations are voiced through the administrators and teachers. Every kid deserves the best”. These are the words of the new principal of this school. She makes clear that the mission of the school is for students to achieve at high levels of proficiency. Data is routinely gathered and analyzed by administrators, coaches and teachers who share information on how students are progressing. The staff supports each other so that good use of data is made to focus on the needs of all students. The school’s priorities for the year are clear and include a high emphasis on data analysis and action planning, the latter of which takes the form of overall and individual goals in each classroom for every discipline. Comparisons with other schools are well used as a means of identifying the school’s strengths and potential areas for improvement. Visits to other junior high schools by teachers of special education students, in particular, has allowed the administrative and teaching staff to study the performance and progress of this cohort in order to refine the curriculum and plan effective interventions.

The school is beginning to develop professional development links to whole-school priorities. Significant efforts are made to support new teachers and enable them to become successful. The curriculum is varied and most teachers are effective in engaging students through lively instruction. The school has not as of yet organized groups of students and aligned the English language arts curriculum on each grade level to match interim data to New York State expectations. There is a high level of respect between staff and students, and all students feel safe in this school.

The focus of the inquiry team is on a group of lower-achieving grade 7 students. The work so far has identified possible curriculum strands that are not matched closely enough to the needs of these students and to change plans to boost their performance. Several areas for improvement recommended in the previous Quality Review report have been addressed this school year. The English language arts coach, lead math teacher and an outside consultant provide extensive professional development for teachers in the use of assessment data. As a result, every English language arts and math teacher across all grade levels has a helpful data folio which includes general, school-wide, class and individual student goals to be used to inform subsequent planning. Improvements and development of a standards-based system for evaluating student writing has resulted in rubrics being used across grade levels that set explicit expectations for the content and design of all students’ writing pieces. Although, this is inconsistent and students do not use them to self-assess and improve their work.

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.

Staff and administrators have a clear picture of student progress and performance as formal assessments in math and English language arts are drawn together. Data is then examined to identify patterns and trends in outcomes. Every English language arts and math teacher across grade levels has a data folio which includes general, school-wide, class and individual student goals. The progress of special education students is monitored very closely especially progress in reading, as this underpins successful learning in other subjects. Additional personnel were hired this school year to increase the academic intervention to those students. The school uses data well to gain a deeper understanding of variations in the performance of special education students and English language learners. Academic intervention is provided to both groups through push-in services, afterschool services and summer school support. A part-time special education supervisor has been hired to provide additional training and support to teachers of special education students.

Comparisons with other schools have allowed this school to identify its strengths and weaknesses based on what schools with similar populations are providing to and for their students. This school year, for example, visits were made to another middle school in this school's progress report peer horizon group to observe instruction in Regents-level classes. As a result, the instruction in the earth science and algebra classes at this school has been improved. Training in the collection and evaluation of data is good. Coaches give staff support in analyzing and understanding data to encourage teachers to apply it to their planning as a matter of routine. Weekly grade meetings always include a data focus on the agenda. The school makes good use of outside expertise such as the Learning Support Organization to further professional development.

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 proficient.

A goal-setting culture pervades the school. The administration and teaching staff collaborate well in shaping the school's priorities. Staff builds on whole-school priorities to create their own action plans for their classes, groups and individual students. There is thus a concerted data driven focus on improving particular areas of the school's performance, although quantified outcomes are not specific for all areas. The school is good at focusing on particular areas of relative weakness. This was illustrated when data illustrated the historic low performance of special education students and English language learners. Both these groups were subsequently targeted for improvement this year. Similarly, following an analysis of its data, the school set a goal for improving the literacy skills of all its students, particularly in vocabulary development. Through regular testing, teachers have a clear overview of the short-term learning goals for each student. Since the previous Quality Review the school has worked well to ensure that aims are communicated clearly to each student. Good practice was seen in one classroom, where individualized learning goals were placed upon each desk so that students were

readily reminded of their targets. High expectations for students are apparent throughout the school, not least concerning their personal behavior and social interaction in class. The school has been successful in incorporating these expectations into everyday class routines.

The extent of communication with parents is good, particularly in providing homes with information about accessing periodic assessment data. The school seeks parents' views through a good range of contacts, which include informal phone and dismissal conversations. The parent coordinator is effective in surveying parents concerning their wants and needs and has been able to draw parents in for adult learning opportunities and to share resources parents may utilize in order to assist their children. Other than at the required parent teacher conferences, parents' opinions about the learning needs and capabilities of their children are not rendered in any forum in a formal or informal way. Parents know the school has high expectations for their children but are not given enough information, about the goals set for their child's performance and progress and are, therefore unable to work with their children at home in order to help them improve.

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 well developed.

The curriculum meets mandated requirements. The core subjects are enhanced by a range of arts opportunities and which all students have access to throughout the school year. The staff is encouraged to be innovative and creative in delivering the mandated curriculum and examples of this were evident during the review. Selected grade 8 students with the help of Creative Educational Services performed scenes from *Inherit the Wind*, the novel currently being read by the entire grade. The performance was given to all students on the grade level. Currently teachers use the data from periodic assessments to create their action plans and to work with students to set and benchmark improvement goals. The English language arts curriculum, however, does not provide meaningful interim data and teachers are not using other formative assessments to evaluate their students' understanding of the content delivered.

In some classes teachers are adept at making spontaneous changes to their planned classes to differentiate content, teach a point in a different way or exploit an unforeseen learning moment, which holds student interest and enhances learning. In others, not all students remained active and focused and opportunities for learning were lost as instruction failed to engage students' interest. Students speak positively about the school, the range of programs available to them and of the caring and supportive staff. All of these contribute significantly to the purposeful atmosphere within the school. A group of students agreed with the comment, "Teachers not only teach us but they work with us to help us improve". Staff and students treat each other with respect and displays of student work in hallways are treated well, indicating respect for fellow students as well as their work. Students feel safe within the school's sections of the building and know there are immediate and fair consequences when inappropriate behaviors are exhibited.

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 is clear that she wants all staff and students to be successful learners, which underpins the professional development activities provided to improve instruction. The administrative team and coaches provide teachers with support to help them deliver effective instruction. Support for all teachers is determined by outcomes of observations or low student achievement results. Teachers are provided with opportunities to visit one another's classes, particularly between grade levels and model classrooms have been established for this purpose. The school is developing links between whole-school goals and professional development opportunities in order to support the staff in delivering the school priorities. At this time, staff is not encouraged to reflect on their professional development, identify what they will apply in their instruction and to record the changes in student progress based on the implementation of new practices. New teachers are provided with a personal mentor who is a coach in the school to work with them in their classrooms on management and instructional support. The school also has a relationship with the lead instructional mentor from the network who works with the coaches to provide the best possible support to the newest teachers. The school runs smoothly during classes, transfer and lunch times and students' behavior show that they are aware of high expectations. The school has established effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of students. The Principal established an afterschool program where many of these partnerships were actualized. The afterschool program provides academic support and enrichment opportunities to more than 100 students. The drama club from the afterschool program recently showcased an evening production of "Annie" to the entire school community including parents and staff.

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 cabinet meets regularly to review the week's activity, share outcomes of their observations and review plans and interventions to ensure that learning continues to be effective. Teachers review student progress based on the results of the periodic assessments to measure the effectiveness of their plans and interventions. The periodic assessments are used to formulate whole class, group and individualized student goals which are revised after the administration of each interim assessment. Some students are active participants in goal setting and are able to analyze the results of their own predictive and instructionally targeted assessments. The English language arts curriculum on each grade level is not yet aligned with interim data to New York State expectations. The school's priorities for the school year include improvement in academic rigor. The principal knows where her school needs to go and is open to "bringing in whatever it will take to get children to perform at high levels of proficiency". There are no plans that define outcomes and interim steps for teachers' professional development, so monitoring of their progress is not against known benchmarks. The principal of this school is an effective leader whose hands on approach had led to providing teachers with the support they need to effectively monitor and evaluate each student's progress throughout the year.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Rafael Cordero Middle School	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 rigorous, 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 and tardiness?				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, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				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