



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Robert Simon School

Elementary School 064

**600 East 6th Street
New York
NY 10009**

Principal: Sandra Litrico

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Lead Reviewer: Paul Smith

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Robert Simon School is an elementary school with 293 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 70% Hispanic, 24% Black and 6% other students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 91.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 100% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal calmly and effectively drives forward change focused on improving student learning.
- Regular assessment of progress towards whole-school targets leads to timely adjustments, which facilitate successful implementation.
- Teachers are confident in their use of data to evaluate student learning.
- Teachers regularly review and modify their lesson plans to better meet the learning goals of their students.
- Collaborative professional development opportunities are clearly aligned to the needs of the students, effectively improving their learning.
- Differentiation is an integral part of classroom practice, so meeting the needs of each student.
- Behavior is good, as there are well-defined disciplinary procedures and an atmosphere of mutual respect between students and adults in the school.
- The school sets pertinent goals for students, which are regularly reviewed and therefore remain relevant to the next steps in their learning.
- The school very effectively implements carefully considered plans for the improved performance of special education students.
- Many of the wide range of extra curricular activities are well focused on enhancing the students' social and emotional development.

What the school needs to improve

- Compare the school's progress and performance against other similar schools.
- Write student goals in a form that their parents can easily understand, so they know exactly how to help their child.
- Ensure teachers' goals are specific and measurable, so progress towards them can be clearly evaluated at set points within the year.
- Ensure the benefits of strategic school decisions are measured in terms of increasing students' performance.

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.

The faculty at The Robert Simon School is ambitious for their students. They are confident that the structures are in place to raise each student's performance beyond basic knowledge, to an understanding of skills and concepts that can be applied in new and exciting situations. This is most developed within the core curriculum, but not as much in areas such as social studies and science.

Well-planned small-group instruction is at the heart of the school and this works well as professional development has enabled teachers to feel confident with this methodology. They frequently revise their instruction in the light of how well their students have understood a unit of work. The groups within the class are constantly changing to reflect varying levels of achievement and styles of learning, so teachers can give differentiated instruction, or target individual students, to meet a particular need. A highly skilled team identifies particularly well the requirements of those students with special needs, which teachers interpret skillfully in the classroom.

Since the previous Quality Review report, the school has examined how it monitors students' progress. There is now a robust system in place so teachers know the achievement of their students and consequently, what should be the next steps in their learning. Teachers frequently share these goals with the students in a one-to-one conversation, so placing the responsibility for taking action partly on the students' shoulders. They are constantly reminded of these goals as the older children write them at the front of their exercise books, while the younger ones place them in "pockets" hung on the classroom walls. However, such rigor is not shown as clearly for teachers' targets, which are vague, so proving difficult to evaluate.

The inquiry team has had a major impact in identifying from standardized tests the root causes of students making insufficient progress. While they initially noticed comprehension skills to be at fault in grade 5, the loss in learning was traced back to failings in the previous two years. This, together with the reformation of the team to involve teachers, has led to a change in emphasis in the curriculum to address these 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 the student's progress over time.

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

Teachers are extremely confident in their use of data, due to extensive and appropriate professional development. They constantly update their records and so know the level at which their students are performing in each area of the curriculum. The information required has been sensibly refined to keep the administrative burden to a minimum. Consequently, teachers refer to it constantly in order to inform instruction of whole-class needs and those of different groups of students within the class. Differentiation is at the center of all instruction as the teacher can focus on how each student may progress at the greatest possible rate.

The school serves special education students particularly well. The pupil personnel team brings together professionals with a wide range of experience twice a month to consider individual students. Together, they have detailed knowledge of the student and the experience to suggest various courses of action. Actions decided upon are extremely specific with a particular individual made responsible for implementation and a report on progress delivered at the next meeting. Cases considered include students displaying lack of academic progress, social or emotional difficulties, or absences from school. Each is carefully considered and the whole gambit of often, original interventions considered, providing a parent with advice over diet, for example.

No clear trends are apparent from the school's interrogation of data for different groups of students. However, the school does not compare itself to similar schools.

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 school's long- and short-term goals are well founded and supported by the faculty. More than this, there is a belief that these plans will lead to students becoming better prepared for life after elementary school. As one teacher said, "We are all reading from the same page." This may be quite literally true, as the principal gives each new teacher the same book on educational practice, most of which are well thumbed.

The school sets specific goals for students in reading, writing and math, which are reviewed and revised frequently. They ensure that the students make sufficient progress through the year to reach the appropriate level of performance. Students know their goals and refer to them frequently in order to concentrate on a particular aspect of their learning, reading fluently, for example. However, while the students may know their goals, having referred to them in class frequently, they are insufficiently specific and parents may not always be aware of exactly what they can do to help their child to make progress.

The school tries hard to involve parents by implementing a wide range of different means by which it can inform them of their child's progress; as a result, communication with parents in both directions is good. There have been surveys that asked parents how the school could improve further in this area and actions, such as workshops on different curriculum areas, has followed the responses.

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 throughout the school provides a wealth of data on student performance, which adds to the teachers' own classroom observations. Coaches and teachers analyze results of standardized assessments to plan instruction in the areas that the students have yet to understand, thus efficiently filling the gaps.

Teachers differentiate instruction by working intensively with small groups of students. The membership of these groups is constantly changing to account for the different levels of achievement in specific areas and the different learning styles of the students. Consequently, teaching challenges students by just the right amount so they are engaged without being discouraged. Thus, instruction is good and increasingly targets students' understanding of concepts and ideas rather than simply knowledge.

Teachers feel accountable for the success of their students and devote much time considering how they can better improve the learning of their students. They focus their annual targets on improving instruction and appropriate professional development helps them to achieve this. Behavior is good as there is an atmosphere of mutual respect between everyone in the school and clear disciplinary procedures.

Difficult decisions are addressed logically, such as in the case of appointing an extra teacher to support small-group work, which was at the cost of music and performing arts courses. This decision was made because there already existed good programming for the performing arts in extracurricular courses through Education Alliance, Rosie's Kids and ballroom dancing, for example. However, there was no formal analysis of the effects on students' learning in this decision. Despite there being no music instruction, the curriculum remains broad with many of the performing arts classes emphasizing curricular goals such as research, presentation and social skills.

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.

Teachers speak enthusiastically of the opportunities for professional development, which are carefully planned to integrate with school reforms. Consequently, the teachers are confident with their implementation. Additionally, the principal's formal and informal observations of classroom teaching are valued as specific help follows. However, the opportunity to work with both coaches and fellow teachers to improve the quality of their

own instruction is the most valued aspect of professional development. Frequently, two teachers on the same grade jointly plan a unit of work. Then one, together with a coach, observes the other teach it. A debrief follows, before the other teaches the same lesson to their class. Therefore, suggestions for improved instruction are based on reality and are more likely to be embedded into future teaching. Observing master teachers, within both the school and elsewhere, is frequent. Always built in to this is the opportunity to discuss and plan future instruction from the lessons learned.

While good behavior is rewarded, for students who display aspects of poor behavior the emphasis is on finding the cause rather than just punishment. However, when punishments are necessary, they often have positive aspects. For example, in the case of not concentrating a student might be asked to maintain focus for 10 minutes.

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 faculty has a shared vision of delivering to the student higher order concepts and skills so their learning is not simply knowledge, but they understand and can apply what they know in different circumstances. In seeking to attain this goal, the school has not been afraid to take bold steps or to change direction when hoped-for benefits do not appear to be as effective as planned. An example of this would be the change in the math curriculum that was in line with the school's aim of stressing concepts rather than simply computational skills. Shortly after beginning the new program, the administration evaluated its impact and teachers responded that basic methods were not sufficiently secure, so endangering students' outcomes. Consequently, the program was revised to maintain computational accuracy while allowing opportunities for greater understanding of why the calculations were necessary. This shows the ability of the school to focus on the impact of a plan, consider the evidence and revise structures in order to improve the overall outcome.

Teachers predict end-of-year student goals based on performance to date and expected gains during the year. These are revised regularly in the light of experience and interventions take place if a particular student falls behind the progress needed to eventually reach their goal. Running records are crucial to this process, and every teacher keeps a meticulous account of the achievements of all their students on which to base their judgments.

Teachers negotiate their individual goals for the year and the support for these forms part of their planned professional development. Feedback from training and classroom observations focuses on these identified areas for improvement. However, this program is in its infancy and such goals are rather vague and only formally reviewed at the end of the year.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Robert Simon 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