



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Jacob August Riis School

Elementary-Middle School 126

**80 Catherine Street
New York
NY 10038**

Principal: Kerry Decker

Dates of review: November 14 - 15, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Joy Stopher

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Joseph August Riis is an elementary-middle school with 724 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 16% Black, 29% Hispanic, 10% White, and 44% Asian students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 14% 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 94.6%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 66% eligibility.

The school has a collaborative team teaching class on every grade from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. Fifty-one percent of pedagogical staff have three years or less teaching experience.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has a clear vision for the future development of the school founded on meeting the needs of each student.
- There is a very high level of collaboration between teachers and administrators and very effective communication channels.
- The commitment and dedication of teachers is evident in the extent to which they plan and assess students' work.
- The school makes very good use of a range of individual student data to inform instruction and enhance learning.
- Special education students receive very good support and are able to learn in an inclusive environment.
- The school provides an exciting and engaging curriculum, including a multitude of sports and after school activities which delight students and parents.
- Strong emphasis is given to improving the quality of teaching and making sure that new staff have the skills they need.
- There is a strong sense of community, good parental support and a high degree of trust between staff and students.
- Good systems are in place to ensure the school is a safe, nurturing environment where students are confident and secure, enabling them to learn effectively.
- Students are given very good support in understanding their goals and knowing what they need to do to improve.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop ways to manage the wide range of qualitative, 'soft' data already in use and introduce portfolios of student work to help track progress over time.
- Extend the current good practice in interdisciplinary planning and teaching.
- Continue to build capacity by maintaining the high quality coaching and providing teachers with more opportunities to use technology in their instruction.

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 Jacob August Riis School has recently won two awards which celebrate and accurately pinpoint where the school is in its development and why. These are the Blackboard Award for the 'Rising Star' public middle school in New York City and the Manhattan UFT School Partnership Award for excellent collaboration between teachers and administration, awarded to the elementary school. The principal has a clear vision for the development of student-centred learning and has set about creating effective communication channels and empowering teachers to work together to improve teaching and learning. Teachers, many of whom are relatively new to the school, have responded to this by demonstrating a very high level of commitment and dedication to the school and their students. Their collection of individual student data is extensive, much of it qualitative, and used to inform some very detailed instructional planning and assessment. The school has recognized the need to find ways to manage this more systematically so it can be shared more easily. This is testament to the good progress the school has made since the last Quality Review in developing teachers' confidence in using data to plan instruction and meet the needs of individual students and small groups. A job well done! Ensuring teachers receive high quality coaching has been essential and is an on-going part of building the school's capacity. Some teachers are beginning to make very good use of technology in their instruction and the school is eager to provide sufficient resources for all staff to be able to do this.

The extent to which students are involved in discussing their goals for improvement, the collaborative team teaching class on every grade which provides excellent support for special education students and the strong sense of community are all contributing to the school's improvement. However, it is what led to students commenting that, "There is so much to do, you never have enough time" and "we want every subject scheduled every day because the electives are so interesting," that gives the clue to an outstanding feature of this school. The curriculum is exciting, engaging and offers art, music, instrumental band, technology, dance, chess and a multitude of intramural sports and after school activity programs which students and their parents love. The school offers the largest sports program in the city and 65% of students play in scholastic sport. There is already good practice in interdisciplinary planning to make the 'links' for students and the school rightly intends to develop this further to maximize the impact of this broad curriculum.

It should come as no surprise that this 'rising star' has set up an inquiry team which represents the full academic spectrum, meets on a weekly basis, has identified a target group and is collecting individual data to find instructional solutions!

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.

The school collects and analyzes a wide range of data well beyond that derived from student performance in State tests. The whole school analysis of performance is quickly analyzed and drilled down to reveal patterns and trends and the support needed for individual students. Monitoring the progress of individual students is a routine part of daily life with a strong emphasis on student centred learning. Teachers take daily conferring notes in reading, writing and math during independent work time, for example. Students' progress in reading is seen as a key indicator of overall performance and is closely monitored at whole school, classroom and grade level. Looking at data is part of the culture of the school and extends to a full range of qualitative, 'soft' data collected by many staff at all levels. The school has recognized that it needs to find effective ways to manage and use this data systematically so that it can track the complete picture of a student's progress from pre-kindergarten through grade 8 and analyze the most effective strategies in improving performance. Writing is a good example of this, where there has been some slippage in progress. This can be seen in comparisons of students' work over time where this is available although this is not yet a fully established part of the school's collection of data.

The school is committed to providing special education students with an inclusive education and takes great care to ensure that their progress and performance are extensively monitored. The collaborative team teaching class on every grade level means that staff are able to monitor progress and performance on a daily basis. Monthly 'minding the gap' grade meetings with the principal are used to discuss student progress and bring this data together. These meetings also focus on data relating to groups of students who may be at risk including English language learners, those with a high level of suspension, attendance or tardiness issues and holdovers.

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 principal has worked very hard to develop a climate of real collaboration and partnership between administration and teachers so that there is 'open and honest feedback' throughout the school. This enables the staff to really debate the action needed and to plan students' next learning steps. Teachers commented that there are "so many people to turn to, to figure out a solution". The way the inquiry team work together is a good example of a collaborative process based on data to solve problems. The structures in place to support students in most need of improvement are impressive and extend to both instructional and social/emotional barriers to learning. There is a real focus on the 'whole child' evidenced by the fact that the school has a full time doctor and a dentist for four days a week. Discussions focus on data and meetings culminate in an individual action plan for teachers and students relating directly to teaching and learning. The plan is then communicated to the parent. Parents of middle school students are encouraged to take part in the action planning process.

There is some excellent practice in involving students in understanding how they need to improve. Students themselves are able to describe how teachers set them goals and how sometimes they are involved in setting their own goals based on assessments and next steps. In one subject, for example, students graded their own performance against a set of criteria, the teacher did the same and then they discussed the differences and similarities. Group work is well embedded and used very effectively to allow students to work together and help each other in 'partnership discussions'. The extent of this was demonstrated by students commenting that "we grow in partnership". Parents are very supportive of the school and its growing reputation in the community. They are appreciative of the improvements that have been made in recent years, the extent to which they feel welcomed and that there is open communication.

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 outstanding.

The school's success in this aspect of its work is built on its fundamental philosophy to educate the whole child and the resulting student centred approach and student driven curriculum. The school uses the balanced literacy model of learning together with the workshop model as well as reading recovery, constructivist math, inquiry science and social studies. The curriculum is very broad and includes art, music, instrumental band, technology, dance and chess. This results in a vibrant school with examples of high quality work on display throughout. Students demonstrate a very high level of engagement, eagerness to learn and sheer excitement at times. The physical education curriculum is based on a philosophy of collaborative learning and teamwork and just has to be seen to be believed! The school has the biggest sports program in the city which makes a significant contribution to the development of the 'whole child'. The school has made significant progress in using data to differentiate instruction and this can be seen throughout the school. Teachers use daily conferring notes and amend their teaching accordingly. There are some examples of outstandingly detailed lesson planning. The principal and assistant principals visit classrooms every day and have a detailed knowledge of how students are progressing. This has had a major impact on helping them to hold teachers to account and bring about improvements and in sharing good practice. It also means that they are well aware of the budgeting, scheduling and staffing decisions needed to achieve the school's goals. A significant factor in this respect is the amount of budget which has been dedicated to hiring high quality staff developers to work with the relatively young staff. This has contributed to the commitment and dedication shown by teachers and the excellent relationships between teachers and students. Students are very appreciative of the support given by teachers and said that they are "not like teachers, they are friends who help you".

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 and assistant principals observe lessons each day, both formally and informally. They rightly recognize the importance of helping teachers to improve and have

made this a key feature of their work. They are well aware of the importance of continuing to build capacity and developing teachers' skills so that the school can realize its full potential. As a result of observations of teachers who use technology to deliver instruction, administration became increasingly aware of its potential and plans are underway to extend this to other classrooms. Similarly, good practice in interdisciplinary planning and teaching has highlighted the potential to extend to help students link their learning in different subjects. The very effective practice which emerges from the frequent visits to classrooms is that teachers are given informal notes followed by 'unannounced' observations' where administration provide feedback and set goals. In this way, professional development can be targeted directly at meeting these goals and is mainly achieved through the mentoring and coaching from the extended team of ten staff developers and coaches. The school is therefore able to provide a high level of support, one on one for new teachers, as well as those who are relatively new. Grade teams are very supportive of new teachers and the teachers themselves are very appreciative of the support they get from the principal and assistant principals. The collaborative culture of the school is providing a good basis for teachers to observe each other and share their practice. Opportunities for teachers to openly evaluate each others' instruction are starting to increase through shared professional development activities, for example in the recent writing workshop.

The school's relatively new discipline plan has clearly defined responsibilities and establishes the boundaries. Both teachers and students comment positively on the improvements that have been made and there has been a significant reduction in the number of principal suspensions this year. Counseling staff are incorporated into grade meetings so the communication is consistent and they are a vital part of goal setting. The school also has a good range of partnerships which support its philosophy of educating the whole child and includes the China Town YMCA which provides an extensive program of after school enrichment.

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 principal has a very clear vision for the future development of the school based on student centred learning and has spent her first three years as principal laying the foundations for this to happen. That she has been successful in creating this climate is clearly evident in the commitment of staff, the support of parents and the enthusiasm of students. She also knows that building capacity takes time and is continually focused on improving instruction and empowering her relatively new staff. She is now articulating her vision for improvement in regular letters and staff meetings. As with all aspects of the school's work, systems for evaluating progress and adapting plans are based on individuals and groups. Plans focus on improving individual student and teacher outcomes. Collaboration and constant discussion inform the next stages of planning. At a strategic level, progress is tracked using periodic reading assessments as a benchmark and indicator and is carried out at very regular intervals. This also includes many forms of data such as attendance and prior intervention. Team meetings and grade meetings are effective in setting goals, reviewing progress and establishing action plans. In order that plans can be revised immediately to reach individual student goals the school is increasing the amount of talk and cooperative learning. This is so that teachers can assess exactly where that student is and what needs to be done next.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Joseph August Riis School	△	▶	✓	+	◇
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 . . .	△	▶	✓	+	◇
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 . . .	△	▶	✓	+	◇
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 make 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