



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**The Robert E Simon School**

**Elementary School 165**

**234 West 109 Street  
New York  
NY 10025**

**Principal: Linda Chen**

**Dates of review: April 17 - 18, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Tony Hubbard**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Robert E Simon School is an elementary school with 590 students from PK through grade 5. The school population comprises 0.5% American Indian, 17.3% African American, 72.4% Hispanic, 5.8% White, 3.3% Asian/Pacific students and just under 1% other. The student body includes 28% 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 92.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 91.3% eligibility.

Robert E Simon provides a distinctive approach to the education of its predominantly Hispanic population. It provides, for those families that want it, a dual language option, in which students are taught all their subjects for half their time in Spanish and half their time in English. The school also offers a dual language gifted program, a collaborative team teaching program as well as a monolingual program for those families that wish for an English-only elementary education.

The school is also proud of its provision for the creative arts, for which it provides art and music for all students throughout every grade.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The whole school community provides a pleasant, safe and caring environment for all its students.
- The principal knows her staff well and provides well-targeted support and professional development that enhances their effectiveness.
- The school administration and teachers take every opportunity to reach out to parents and improve the progress and growth of its students.
- The teachers' well-established reflective and collaborative approach has given great consistency to the planning across grades.
- The school provides a particularly broad, balanced and engaging curriculum for all its students, with a multicultural flavor.
- The dual-language courses are well conceived and taught so that students progress well in two languages and cultures.
- Administration and teachers have made great strides in establishing the analysis of data as a basis for their teaching.
- The administration has established effective alternative means to assess English Language Arts and Spanish, linked to state standards.
- Teachers and administration have been very successful in finding strategies to accelerate the progress of students with the greatest needs.
- The principal makes excellent use of outside agencies to enhance the learning of students and the professional development of teachers.

### What the school needs to improve

- Raise teachers' expectations of the quantity, accuracy and presentation of students' writing and speaking skills, to match that already found in some parts of the school.
- Through classroom observation ensure that teachers focus on encouraging all students to speak clearly, confidently and, where appropriate, at length.
- Make use of lesson observation to ensure that the layout, display and modeling of the curriculum engages all students.

## 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.**

Under the leadership of the principal, the teachers enable all their students, especially those with the greatest learning needs, to make good progress in a safe and caring environment, where each individual is valued. She has secured an unusual and diverse curriculum in which students of either Hispanic or non-Hispanic heritage can learn in both languages and cultures or in English language alone. The result is a highly inclusive and engaging curriculum with substantial strength in the arts, evident in the quality of students' work around the school. She has been very successful in her use of outside agencies to develop her teachers and to enhance and support the learning of students. The school also reaches out strongly to its parents, engaging them fully in the school's strategic planning and doing all it can to help parents to support the education of their children. The principal has established highly collaborative and reflective ways of working, and this shows through in the rigor with which teachers plan together at grade level, routinely starting from test and observation data and moving to set the next set of goals and approaches, informed by their common understanding of the students. The dual language teaching of whole curriculum operates exceptionally well, with clear delineation of the different needs of Spanish-dominant or English-dominant students. Expectations of the quantity and accuracy of sustained writing and speaking are too modest, however, and not all classrooms model the curriculum and the goals as effectively as the best. The principal and staff have moved the school forward decisively since the last review, because of the effectiveness of her strategic planning, constantly revising and modifying priorities in the light of emerging evidence. Administration and teachers now have a very good understanding of the progress and needs of all students, even in areas, such as Spanish, where the City wide data and analysis are not available. Their assessments are, wherever possible, now linked to State standards. Teachers and administration use the many tools available to make sure that all students of all performance levels do as well as they can. They now have a very good understanding of the progress of all their students and of the different groups. This has enabled the inquiry team to devise smart strategies to support dual-language students who may be struggling with English language arts.

#### **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.**

Since the last review, the principal has moved the school decisively forward, so that both administrators and teachers have, and share collaboratively, a very good understanding of

their students' needs. The school uses and generates both quantitative and qualitative data, including City and State tests, reading scores, its own assessments, carried out according to detailed rubrics across the full curriculum, and teachers' observations. The school has also developed its ability to analyze information from its design your own (DYO) approach to testing English language arts. The school ties this information in with, for example, student reading levels so that all teachers have a precise knowledge of individual student progress. The analysis of quantitative data is often penetrating and concentrates on diagnosing what holds students back and on helping them forward. In this process, they focus on all groups and subgroups, with a particular focus on special education students and English language learners. The inquiry team deployed the gamut of comparisons, over time and short term, and at school, grade, subject, class and individual levels. They also brought into play attendance data and their extensive understanding of teachers and intervention services of relevant features of family history so that they were able to devise good strategies to overcome barriers to learning. Appropriate training and technical support has enabled staff to make good use of the analytic tools now available to them. Information about students is routinely updated and across all subjects, rubrics are used to ensure that assessments are rigorously calibrated in a manner, which enhances teacher's understanding of how to support and accelerate the progress of all their students.

**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.**

Teachers, both individually and collaboratively, make full use of the information available to them to set appropriate and differentiated goals and teaching strategies. They modify them in the light of further evidence in order to meet the needs of all students. Common planning at grade and cluster levels establishes consistency of approach and priority in instruction. The coordination of planning, teaching and assessment between Spanish-oriented and English-oriented teachers of the paired dual-language classes provides exceptional consistency in both subject coverage and expectations of individual students. This reflective collaboration goes right through the school, because it is built into the structure and scheduling. Teachers and administration have been very successful in finding strategies to accelerate the progress of students with the greatest needs. Teachers are particularly effective in planning suitable goals for English language learners and for students with special educational needs. In setting goals, and in the way they teach, administration and teachers project to the students and their parents and caregivers high expectations for achievement and personal behavior and growth, so that students behave well, work hard and stay on task in their lessons. However, as some teachers have noticed, the quantity of writing, and particularly of sustained writing, is in some cases modest. Also, in many cases, presentation and accuracy are not good enough. Similarly, when they speak or respond to questions in class, students often do not articulate their words clearly or speak at length. The school keeps parents well-informed about their children's progress and personal growth, as is reflected in the positive response to the school environment survey from parents. Teachers and administration use every means at their disposal to engage parents in the life of the school and to help them support the education of their children. All class teachers send a monthly class newsletter to the parents of their students and in cases where parents have not responded, an assistant principal makes personal home visits.

**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 students enjoy a broad, balanced, varied and well-differentiated educational experience. Dual language students are able either to maintain their mother tongue as part of their general education, or, in effect, learn a foreign language to an exceptionally high standard for their ages. All students study both art and music continuously throughout their time in the school, enabling them to make continuous progress and to produce work of a good quality. The principal has enriched the experience by bringing in Studio in a School and the New York Philharmonic, even having one student’s composition performed by them in the Very Young Composers’ program. In planning work for their students, administration and teachers routinely build in assessment and testing so that they can track the progress of students and modify their plans accordingly. They also build in substantial opportunities for students to take responsibility for assessing their own and each other’s work, which they do in an intelligent and mature way. The principal and assistant principals make sure that teachers engage their students and cater for differences of learning need and potential, so lessons are well planned and interesting, many affording opportunities for practical work. However, the layout and displays in classrooms do not always show aims or model the structure of the curriculum in a way that reinforces the students’ interest and engagement sufficiently well. The principal efficiently deploys staff, guidance, scheduling and other resources to support the school’s priorities. She has been quick to find ways to push in extra staff or to reschedule, as problems and needs emerge.

The whole school affords a calm, secure and caring environment in which teachers and other services make sure that students are able to grow and flourish as young people. No less attention is paid to students’ personal growth than to their academic progress. So, older students are encouraged to help young students with reading and to help teachers of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten with simple administrative tasks. At all ages students are encouraged to take responsibility for administrative class items and have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the school through the student council, even helping devise the school’s vision statement: “Dare to dream, to achieve, and to make a difference together”.

**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 have in most respects a good understanding of the strengths and needs of teachers through both formal and informal visiting to classrooms as well as through their analysis of data at grade, class and subject level. In visiting classrooms and attending staff meetings they focus on the students and on their learning and well-being, so that they also know the students themselves and have the best basis for understanding the effectiveness of teaching and care. However, they do not focus

sufficiently on consistency in the quality and quantity of writing or on the opportunities for extended talk by the students. Where needed, action to improve teaching has taken the form of support and professional development. Professional development is built into the life of the school, through the frequent meetings, through purposeful inter-visitation by teachers and through internal and external courses geared to the school's goals and the teachers' professional needs leading to consistency and differentiation in planning. The school's success in managing and operating successfully such diverse curriculum models owes much to the united and reflective nature of the school's administration and staff. Excellent use has been made of outside agencies to provide training, to support students' personal and emotional needs and to enhance and enrich their educational experience. The use of a YMCA Out of School Time program has greatly extended the opportunities for many students. The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project has helped hone teachers' skills in analyzing achievement and setting goals. The induction of many new staff, including a high proportion of teachers new to teaching is being successfully implemented by pairing new teachers with veteran mentors and providing excellent support and guidance.

The good behavior and confidence of students attest to the effectiveness of both teachers and guidance in supporting students, while the almost negligible rate of suspensions demonstrate the school's success managing behavior in a positive way. The school is efficiently managed and operates smoothly; no mean feat, considering the complexity of programs that have to be orchestrated and balanced.

**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.**

Since the last review, whole school, administration and staff have set in place effective procedures to check the progress of both long-term and short-term goals, making appropriate adjustments in the light of new information or circumstances. Teachers' plans for individuals and groups and the overall school plans are constantly under review in this way, supporting the exemplary gains made last year in English language arts by the lowest achieving Hispanic students. Similarly, goals for teachers are differentiated to their circumstances and are clearly defined and verifiable. For teachers, the prime device for monitoring the effectiveness of plans is the grade meeting. These meetings have tight agendas and are conducted in a businesslike way, starting from data, observation and review and culminating in the setting of or adjustment to goals. Teachers regularly discuss and resolve the needs of both individuals and groups of students, recognizing particular difficulties and identifying any general weakness that may occur in a subject or element of a subject so that goals and strategies may be revised accordingly. Separate meetings are convened as necessary to discuss and review the progress of students or groups of particular concern. The principal and her cabinet keep the progress of school plans under regular review from the data being gathered and make any necessary adjustments. This has been done, for example in the case of the plans to improve levels of reading and writing. So, for example, the principal has noticed that not all teachers are equally able to diagnose and remedy problems and is providing appropriate professional development to resolve this. The principal has a clear vision for the future, shared with staff and the senior leadership, who play a full part in the setting and monitoring of school aims and policy.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The Robert E Simon School</b>	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>				X	

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .</b>	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				X	

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .</b>	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>				X	

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					X

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>