



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Robert F. Kennedy School

Elementary - High School 169

**110 East 88 Street
New York
NY 10128**

Principal: Susan Finn

Dates of review: January 30 - 31, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Helen Donnellan

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 Robert F. Kennedy School is a District 75 cluster school with 220 students from kindergarten through grade 12. The school population comprises 45% Black, 51% Hispanic, 3% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 81% of the students enrolled and girls account for 19%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 83.4%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The school has a self-contained main site and three other sites. These are located within an elementary school, high school and a child and adolescent program at a psychiatric hospital. The school negotiates with each site to obtain access to facilities for its students.

The school serves students using standardized and alternate assessments. The range of disabilities includes autism, emotional disability, psychiatrically fragile and developmental delays.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides strong leadership, making her expectations clear to staff and students in a firm and professional manner.
- She has established a culture of reviewing the school's work and does not accept "what is, is what always will be."
- Observation write-ups are exceptionally clear linking teachers' actions to students learning, stating how teachers can improve and the gains to be made from implementing suggestions.
- Extensive and effective partnerships with other services and agencies meet the needs of students and their families through unified delivery of services.
- Principles for behavior are defined in the KARMA approach, giving students successful strategies for self-control leading to reduced disruptive incidents.
- Students know what is expected of them and what to aim for in making academic and emotional progress.
- The school gathers extensive data on all students as a matter of routine, to monitor progress and measure performance.
- Data is used productively to identify students' strengths, areas with less than anticipated progress and set goals for instruction, all which are known to educational and related service staff.
- The curriculum is broadly based, which helps to sustain students' interest and participation in classes.
- The school works hard to involve parents in their children's education and is continually extending the ways it does this.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the formal planning processes to show tasks, responsibilities and outcomes to turn the long-term vision for the school into reality.
- Explore ways in which staff can increase how they share their professional expertise.
- Continue to provide professional development for staff on analyzing and interpreting data to reduce their reliance on coaches and administration.

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 principal of the Robert F Kennedy school strives for continual improvement, with evaluating and reviewing plans seen as an important part of its work. This is a school which strives to support students in overcoming their previous challenges and enabling them to receive extensive support for their education and emotional growth. Data is well used to gather a full picture of the performance and progress of every student, regardless of the site they attend. Staff are not all confident about using data in spite of recent training. The school is working hard to cultivate a positive approach to communicating with all parents, to overcome earlier experiences. School staff and staff from other agencies work in closely knit teams to deliver a unified service to students and their families around academic, emotional and social issues. The school plans well on a yearly basis, but has not planned how it will achieve its longer-term vision.

The school has developed a highly effective attitude modification approach, KARMA, for managing student behavior that has led to a significant fall in negative incidents. Students are clear about how KARMA works and are motivated to achieve positive recognition through gaining KARMA points and tickets. The administration sees professional development as crucial to improving instruction. The focus of formal observations is of such high quality that staff are left with no doubt about changes needed to raise instruction and the benefits of these. Data has shown under-performance in math in grade 6, and research into the reasons for this and positive actions to overcome them are the current focus of the inquiry team.

The school has successfully addressed issues raised in the last review. These include analyzing the performance and progress of students by gender and ethnicity and implementing a successful behavior modification program.

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 gathers extensive data on students' academic and emotional progress through systematically organized assessments. Results of assessments by other professionals are considered alongside academic data to give a holistic view of progress and performance. Data is used effectively to gain deeper insights into students'

behavior and patterns of learning, as staff try to identify causes and triggers that lead to some students not cooperating. Data on unacceptable behavior is gathered as a matter of course and shows improvements since the introduction of the KARMA approach.

The school analyzes data using gender and ethnic information to gain a better understanding of variations in learning outcomes. This shows that currently girls outperform boys in English language arts and math but that there is little difference between the rates of progress and performance achieved by Black and Hispanic students. The school continues to monitor this so any variances can be reflected in instruction. The principal takes care to analyze Grow reports to highlight progress and also compares the whole-school performance against another District 75 school with a similar student population. There is equal rigor in gathering and analyzing standardized and alternate assessments. Whilst staff have received training in understanding and analyzing data, some have low confidence in handling data and analyzing recently introduced assessments and are dependent on coaches and administration to support them in using data.

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.

Data is used routinely to determine students’ goals and to plan how these will be achieved. The school makes clear to every teacher and student that during a student’s time at the school, they will increase their performance to at least one level above their level at entry. This means accelerated instruction and learning since the majority of students are at Level 1 when they first enter the school. Students are clear about their academic goals, the small steps they need to achieve to reach these goals and goals for improved behavior. These are based on the KARMA structure, so students are regularly informed of their progress and the implications for any lapses in academic work or behavior.

Students know their goals and are highly motivated to receive positive feedback on their progress and performance. This is a crucial aspect for their development, as many of them have experienced failure, rejection and humiliation so some arrive at the school with low self-esteem and low expectations of themselves. The positive recognition they receive from staff and their peers enables them to gradually build more positive self-images. They are eager to access test scores using the Acuity system which gives immediate results on their work. They value the ways in which teachers break down work into small tasks which helps them to master skills and gain understanding.

Teachers and other agency staff work as a unified team to provide the services needed by students. At common planning time and other collaborative meetings, staff discuss formal data and samples of student work and this forms the basis for changes to intervention and programs. This helps ensure that accelerated learning is supported. The administration team’s interrogation of data pinpointed weaker strands within English language arts tests in grade 7 and significant increases in math in grades 6 and 7, which led to changes in instruction to strengthen these areas. School, grade and student goals are shared with all those working with students, which support effective working partnerships. Informal sharing of information and planning of agreed approaches is

strengthened further by focused study groups, in which numbers of professionals from the school and other agencies work together to plan specific intervention to address weaker areas of learning.

The school works hard to involve families and care agencies, where these are involved, in students' education. For students in some programs within the school, participation with families is mandatory, and parents, staff and students meet together weekly to share progress and areas to work on. The principal has changed the culture of contacting parents, from one of reporting only negative situations to that of mostly positive ones. Parents are becoming more involved in school life and see that staff are concerned about the student as a person.

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 is broadly based, with a range of practical, sport, art and technology classes to extend the mandated curriculum. In spite of being a multi-sited school, the school negotiates for all students to have access to sports facilities and field-trips, to extend their learning experiences.

The principal and assistant principals hold staff to account through frequent informal walk-throughs of classes at all sites, to ensure that the teachers are delivering the curriculum to match the needs of each student in their class. They also monitor the frequency of teachers' visits to the Scantron data site, to verify that available data is being routinely accessed and used in instruction.

The principal carefully plans the use of resources at all sites to ensure that they are used to optimum effect. The schedule has been changed to make the most of the calming effect of yoga for some students at the start of the school day, which reduces disruptive incidents in later periods.

Students are confident to trust staff, share anxieties and develop problem-solving strategies with them, which reflects high levels of mutual trust. Students show increasing motivation to come to school. Incentives for whole-class attendance have seen them take the initiative to encourage each other to attend school more regularly and gain recognition for the whole class.

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 school's goal to provide accelerated learning is dependent on high-quality instruction and the school works hard to continue to improve instruction at all sites. The principal gives staff and students clear direction and conveys high expectations for instruction and learning. Many of the records of classroom observations are of the finest

quality, where the observer uses an agreed format and structure making clear to the teacher the effect of doing or not doing something and with an explicit focus on what the students actually learned in the lesson observed. Within a formal write-up the observer makes it clear what students will gain when the teacher uses the suggestions. The school has many highly-skilled staff with expertise in working in challenging and unusual educational settings, but sharing that expertise is limited. While some opportunities do exist for staff to learn from each other, it is under-used as a valuable source of professional development.

School staff, other professionals and medical, social work and clinical agencies work together to deliver unified services so effectively that it is hard to discern who is on the school staff and who is not. Productive relationships with other agencies enable vacation support programs to run and provide continuity of services for students. Some clinics are located with the school sites, so students can be seen during their school day and do not miss school due to clinical appointments. This reflects the school ethos of serving well both education and treatment.

The KARMA program is pivotal to students taking responsibility and is routinely applied by staff at all sites. The number of negative incidents has fallen significantly and students show commitment to the KARMA approach.

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 established a culture of reviewing and evaluating all aspects of the school's work as part of her drive for continual improvement. Goals are in place for academic and behavioral aspects of the school's work. These goals are precise and allow progress towards them to be monitored. The school's current systems for planning relates to the year ahead, but the principal and staff have a clear longer term vision of enabling students to achieve at the same level as their general education peers. There is currently no written long-term plan which sets out the specific tasks and responsibilities needed to achieve this vision.

Staff routinely review assessment data and predictive test scores before testing periods to determine additional intervention that may be needed for students to consolidate their learning. The administration and staff teams review test data as soon as it becomes available, to minimize further limitations in students' performance. Ways to eliminate some slowing down of progress are currently being explored, in order to maintain and even raise students' performance.

The impact of changes in organization is also monitored, with a current focus being on the impact of changes to systems for common planning time. Systems are also reviewed. This is clear from the changes to recording disruptive incidents as part of the successful plan to improve behavior and the accuracy of reporting to the District.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| SCHOOL NAME: Robert F. Kennedy 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 |