

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research

High School 332

**965 Longwood Avenue
Bronx
NY 10459**

Principal: Sharif Rucker

Dates of review: April 21 - 22, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Sandra Litrico

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research is a high school with 283 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 39% Black, 58% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% American Indian and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 3% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 81.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 86% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research is a collaborative school community that strives to produce confident young adults through the implementation of programs that support academic progress, social skills and emotional growth. The school is proactive in preparing students and parents for the college application process. The principal and assistant principal are a dynamic team that sets clear expectations for staff and students. The teachers are dedicated and eager to improve their craft by sharing best practices and working collaboratively on curriculum mapping. They also analyze data to inform their lessons. However, they do not yet give sufficiently clear feedback to students, either on their reasons for success or the actions they need to take to improve their work. The absence of short-term goals to support improvement means teachers find it harder to differentiate instruction. Administrators, coaches and teachers lead professional development workshops and engage in department and grade level meetings. Additional professional development focused on using data to set measurable goals for individual students, as well as differentiating instruction, is in the planning stages.

Parents are held accountable, along with their children, for attendance, promoting academic excellence and rules and regulations which are reflected in a respectful, responsible and safe environment. There is good communication between parents, staff and administrators. One of the school's goals is to increase parent involvement through school-wide events and additional workshops.

A variety of data, including authentic assessments, is collected to determine whether instructional objectives of each lesson have been taught. However, the data is not used effectively in determining student learning outcomes. As a result, lessons are not differentiated to meet the needs of individual students. There is no system in place to track student progress with set timeframes. Each department is working diligently on developing a system to facilitate this process. More generally, the school has a clear vision for the future, but its plans do not include sufficient measurable interim goals and timeframes to ensure progress towards it vision is tracked effectively.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Staff gather a range of relevant data across all subjects to understand student performance, and regularly collaborate to identify trends and modify practice.
- The school effectively conveys student outcomes and learning needs to parents and consistently communicates high expectations in many tangible ways, including public displays of information about attendance, behavior and achievement.
- Staff collaborate well, assist each other professionally and are positive role models for students, enabling all students to feel safe and cared for, and to engage with learning.
- Teachers plan together and visit each other's classrooms to share ideas and best practices in order to continually improve students' learning outcomes.
- The school curriculum and extension activities, together with excellent support from outside organizations, create a wide range of opportunities for students to grow academically and socially.
- This small school is supportive of students, staff and families with a sound understanding of its strengths, areas of continued development and a clear vision and commitment for its future growth.

What the school needs to improve

- Build on the excellent start to goal setting by enabling all teachers to develop their practice in negotiating individual learning goals for students that define next steps in achieving long-term goals and involve students more actively in self-assessment.
- Ensure that learning activities, student groupings and the differentiation of instruction provide high levels of appropriate challenge for all students at all achievement levels.
- Be sure that feedback to students on their work gives detailed reasons why they were successful and clear next steps for improvement, based on specific rubrics to help them set and achieve their learning goals.
- Sharpen school improvement planning by identifying specific interim and long-term goals with measurable outcomes against which progress can be measured, readjustments made and success evaluated.

Part 3: Main Findings

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

School leaders and faculty collect formal and informal data, including weekly authentic assessments in math, English language arts and all other core subjects. The information is used to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The authentic assessment initiative was implemented as a result of an inconsistency in grading policies. As a result, teachers have a clearer understanding of what needs to be revisited and which skills need to be strengthened. After a careful analysis of student performance, writing was targeted as an area needing improvement. Although the data was disaggregated to identify subgroups, the staff found that the need to improve writing skills was a school-wide issue. This led to the development of rubrics and the teaching of the mechanics and organization of writing in all core subjects. Teachers maintain data binders but they do not use the information in them to identify short-term goals and next steps for individual students. As a result, students do not understand what skills or strategies they need to work on in order to achieve their individual goals. They are more focused on attainment of long-term unit goals.

The attendance team meets weekly to monitor student attendance. Parents state that they are always informed of their child's lateness or absence from school via daily phone calls, letters and home visits. Students are publicly acknowledged on hallway displays for excellent attendance and reaching their set goals for improvement. School activities such as dress-down days and school spirit days have contributed to an increase in attendance by several percentage points.

The school continues to promote open communication with parents about student learning needs and outcomes. At the beginning of the year, a syllabus is distributed to all parents and students to set clear expectations for learning. Parents can also access students' grades and homework through an on-line school website called "SnapGrades". Parent workshops on understanding progress reports, how to read transcripts and the college application process further enhance communication. The administration is continuously planning events to promote greater parent participation.

Administrators use data to inform instructional and organizational decisions. They have adopted the Read 180 program to address the needs of English language learners, special education students and at-risk general education students. Further review of data revealed that girls out-performed boys in most core subjects. As a result, school leaders and staff created several student support groups with the theme "Each one, teach one", a mentorship and tutoring program for boys which supports their self-confidence.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school sets instructional, department and school goals which are monitored and revisited periodically. These goals are clearly focused on raising student achievement. One of the department goals was “inclusion of writing into the curriculum through exit tickets”. As a result, there is consistency of instruction across all departments and content areas. Student-teacher goal setting conferences are held at the beginning of each quarter. Each department also collaborates to develop instructional goals and essential questions for each curriculum area. However, the school has not yet developed teachers’ ability to set individual student learning goals that include interim benchmarks with specific timeframes to track students’ progress. There is little evidence that teachers conference regularly with students to facilitate self-assessment and to help them monitor achievement of these goals. As a result, there are no identified next steps or interim goals set within a designated period and there is little differentiation of instruction. The goal-setting process that is implemented in the school monitors the quality of instruction, rather than individual student learning goals or their achievement.

The Comprehensive Educational Plan is designed collaboratively with input from the entire school community. The goals of the plan are reflective of student needs and the action plan includes effective strategies for raising student achievement. Student data provides good opportunities for staff to engage in discussions around implications for planning. The dedicated staff and administrators work together during common planning time and before and after school to share ideas and best practices.

The school communicates high expectations and academic excellence for all students. Exemplary students, including those who have shown improvement, are highlighted on bulletin boards and are celebrated at Annual Student Achievement Dinners. Parents are informed of achievement of students’ personal goals including attendance. The school offers a wide variety of Regents and college preparatory programs. Students visit colleges and attend career awareness workshops. The school’s leaders and other staff maintain open lines of communication with parents and students around their learning in the form of assessment results. Parents receive progress reports with their child’s grades and levels of performance. However, these reports do not include interim goals with the next steps to achieve them, to allow effective tracking of individual progress.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school follows the State curriculum standards in all core subjects. Teachers are knowledgeable and exhibit expertise in their subject areas. Each lesson is focused with an essential question to drive instruction. Students are engaged in lessons but there is little evidence that higher-level students are sufficiently challenged. Many activities lack rigor and do not encourage critical thinking skills. There is little evidence of differentiation in classroom instruction. Although students work in groups, groups are not consistently established according to prior achievement data, goals or learning styles. As a result, some students are not being challenged and not making adequate progress.

Member of staff collaborate well and assist each other professionally through common planning and intervisitations. Teachers are positive role models and are available to students for academic and emotional support. Students said they feel safe and cared for by their teachers. They are aware of the graduation requirements and administrators ensure that each student fulfills their requirements. School leaders and faculty meet regularly to make instructional decisions and ensure alignment with the curriculum in English language arts, math, science and social studies. Teachers use the school's weekly authentic assessment analysis to determine students' learning. This assessment system uses a 70% baseline to determine if mastery of the concept has been achieved. If not, the teacher revisits the lesson. This has a positive impact on students learning by reducing failure and lowering frustration levels. However, this information is not used to plan differentiated instruction.

The school's administrators utilize the budget effectively to ensure that staffing and organizational decisions support student learning. As a result, there has been a positive impact on school improvement plans and student achievement. The implementation of programs such as Read 180 and Rosetta Stone has increased language acquisition skills and comprehension for targeted students. College prep workshops and after-school activities further extend the curriculum. Scheduling allows time for teachers to collaborate and develop action plans that include instructional goals. A universal policy on the design of follow-up assignments, rubrics and grading policies are included in the action plans

It is evident throughout the school that there is a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning. Programs such as Drumline, Ladies First, Sophisticated Scholars and Men of Majesty all promote and support social, emotional and academic growth of students. The development of project-based learning is giving students the opportunity to undertake research, solve problems and be more active learners. The caring staff encourage students to do their best.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient

Administrators regularly observe classroom instruction to ensure planned school initiatives become routine practice. Observations concentrate on the development of big ideas and essential questions as teachers develop project-based learning. However, feedback from observations is not always focused on student learning outcomes. Each teacher has a written plan which outlines their professional development goals for the year. This information is used to tailor professional development activities and is shared with mentors and coaches to improve instructional practices. Structured professional development activities support teacher needs and school goals.

Coaches from the Institute of Student Achievement work with staff on differentiation, curriculum mapping, classroom management and environment. Coaches and administrators model lessons and have set up an intervisitation protocol to encourage the sharing of best practices. Staff and administrators acknowledge that many of the professional development activities have positively impacted instructional practices and classroom management, as evidenced by increased student engagement. As of yet, there has been little impact on differentiation of instruction.

All teachers are encouraged to take part in inquiry teams and other structured professional collaborations. Teachers are engaged in weekly department and grade-level meetings. Last year's successful inquiry work identified areas of academic need. In response to that work, new courses were created in math and a Saturday AIS program has been implemented. This year the inquiry team has focused on writing across the curriculum. All teachers are incorporating the inquiry team focus as grammar and writing organizational skills are being taught in all subjects. This has resulted in an improvement in student writing as evidenced in portfolios and assessment results.

School leaders and faculty do an excellent job of utilizing youth development, support services and partnerships to support the academic and personal growth of students. ASPIRA, an after-school program, provides cultural awareness activities. The Bronx Ensemble allows students to learn conflict resolution through drama. College visits, along with workshops for parents to understand the process of college application, help students and families plan future goals. Case conferences are facilitated with staff, students and parents to address student progress, attendance and social issues.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 proficient

School staff set long-term goals for student progress and periodically monitor success toward achieving these goals. School leaders use the Progress Report, Quality Review and Learning Environment Survey, along with findings from the inquiry team and authentic assessments, to evaluate the effectiveness of organizational decisions and modify them as required. However, they have not established rigorous and measurable interim goals for individual students with time-frames for evaluating success and making adjustments throughout the year.

School leaders use data, including that from formal and informal observations, to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers' instruction and align professional development opportunities to support their needs. However, there is no structure in place to provide evidence of the impact of feedback from observations and professional development activities. The school has established department lead teachers to emphasize the use of data in planning units of work. At-risk students are given extra support but higher-level students are not being provided with sufficiently challenging projects. Teachers conference with students regularly. However, a system for keeping track of conferencing notes with students is in the developmental stage. As a result, instruction is not as strategic as it should be and individual student goals are not being monitored effectively.

The principal and assistant principal are highly self-reflective and are genuinely concerned about student academic performance and progress. The principal and the cabinet have developed an agreement of expected classroom practice across the school. He has set clear expectations and goals for the future development of the school that are shared with the entire school community. Professional development plans reflect the need for differentiation of instruction and setting short-term learning goals for students. The administrators and staff are continuously refining practice and programs to meet students' needs as indicated by data. The principal's positive leadership, which is fully embraced by all staff, is driving the vision for continually improving student achievement.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

Holcombe L. Rucker School of Community Research	△	▷	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?				X
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			X	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?				X
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?		X		
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYQ, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

To what extent do ...	Δ	➤	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X	
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X		
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				
X				

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent do school leaders...	Δ	➤	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X	
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?				X
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X	
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				
X				

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X	
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X	
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				
X				

Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed