

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**The Robert Fulton School**

**Elementary School 008**

**37 Hicks Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11201**

**Principal: Seth Phillips**

**Dates of review: October 23 - 24, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Chris Andrews**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Robert Fulton School is an elementary school with 531 students from kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 32% Black, 12% Hispanic, 48% White, 7% Asian and 1% American Indian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 94.1%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding. The steady increase in enrollment over the past four years has put pressure on available space. There are no specialist rooms for gym, music or science, and the only art room is scheduled to be converted to a classroom in the near future.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

Under the current principal, the Robert Fulton School has become a school to which students wish to come and where their parents are very happy to send them. The whole school community is committed to the vision of developing fully rounded young people. There is a strong focus on ensuring that students acquire a deep-seated set of personal values and an appreciation that education is more than the basic curriculum. This vision is reflected in the good relationships which exist within the school and in the excellent range of enrichment activities which foster the children's personal and academic growth.

Students enjoy coming to school, not just because they "learn lots of new stuff" but because their teachers clearly value them, engage their interest and stimulate their curiosity. They feel safe and most feel challenged by what they have to do. They are also well known, something which parents greatly appreciate and which allows teachers to target their instruction appropriately. The progress that some students make, however, does not always match that which is expected. This is, in part, because goal setting across the grades is not consistent and also because the goals themselves are not always specific enough to focus the next stages of learning or to provide enough challenge for students. In a similar manner, whole school goals are not always prioritized clearly.

There have been many changes in the faculty in recent years, and this has created challenges for the principal in securing continuity of instruction. However, these have been met and the relatively inexperienced staff is very well supported by the administrators and the staff developers. The development of individual goals for teachers is encouraging a genuine culture of reflection among the staff, and it also reflects the school's vision of creating lifelong learners. Parents are part of this process, not only by regularly sharing their own knowledge of their children's needs, but even in leading some professional development for teachers in respect of childhood allergies and their implications. As a result, the school functions as a real and growing focus for its community.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school collects and analyzes data in English language arts, math and some other core subjects which effectively contributes to teachers' planning and instruction.
- There is excellent communication between school and home about student progress and performance that allows parents to become genuine partners in their children's education.
- The enrichment programs, both in and after school are of the highest quality and support and enhance the academic and personal growth of the students.
- Students enjoy coming to school, are engaged by most of their classes and feel valued by the adults in the building.
- The school is a genuine learning community as is shown by the collaborative nature of the planning and the reflective practices which are encouraged by the administration.
- The principal has very clear vision for the school's future in respect of the development of the whole child, a vision shared by all staff and parents.

### What the school needs to improve

- Develop further the processes for data collection and goal setting to extend the current practices across all core subjects.
- Focus attention on ensuring that there is a continuum between each grade to support student learning and progress.
- Further develop teacher expertise in the analysis of data in order to increase the degree of rigor in instruction to accelerate the learning of students at all levels and grades to secure the required progress year-on-year.
- Continue to develop the whole-school planning process so as to ensure that the necessary next steps for the school's further improvement are clearly prioritized and monitored.

## 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.**

The school collects and analyzes a wide range of data in English language arts and math which show what the students know and can do. This data effectively contributes to teachers' planning and instruction because they are able to group students and focus their instruction. It also allows them to track their students as they progress through the year and provide interventions as required. This happens in certain other core subjects such as science, through the FOSS science program, and social studies, but not in every subject, nor is there the same consistency in data collection in these other core areas. The collection of data for sub-groups ensures that the school knows, for example, that girls have been outperforming boys. The provision of a boys' weekend club, part academic and part social, has been one outcome of this analysis. Good school attendance is a prerequisite for being allowed to attend the club, as the school identified a clear link between poor attendance and underperformance. It is too soon this year to reach firm conclusions as to the impact of this initiative this year, but last year's experience has suggested that it is effective. All special education students are placed in collaborative team-teaching classes, with the needs of their individual education plans addressed by pushing in the mandated support. Analysis has shown that they make gains in this context, but also benefit socially from being more integrated with general education students.

There is excellent communication between school and home about student progress and performance that allows parents to become genuine partners in their children's education. The school has an open-door policy which welcomes parents in the hallways and classrooms in the early morning, so they can conference easily with teachers and look at the children's work. There are three formal meetings a year with each grade, but teachers send home letters between reporting periods to ensure that parents are kept aware of strengths and areas for development. The introduction of the computerized program Assessment Pro this year, to generate on-going reports for parents, is a positive move to formalize the current practice. As a result parents are able to provide targeted help at home and support their children effectively.

**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 principal uses data from the previous year’s tests as the basis for establishing whole-school goals for English language arts and math. These reflect the prior performance of the students and the gains required to enable the school to show overall progress. Goals for individual classes are linked to whole-school goals, but are arrived at as the result of conversations with teachers about their own classes. As a result, these goals are realistic, based on an understanding of the individual students, and challenging, as they reflect the need to move the whole grade forward. There is less consistency in setting goals in other core subjects, but in science and physical education there are clear programs which provide goals and the assessments needed to test that these goals are met. The Fitnessgram testing program allows for clearly differentiated goals based on age and other factors. In science and social studies, teachers tie subject goals to the literacy needs of their students. This effectively differentiates goals and also develops the students’ sense of cross-curricular links, for example, providing an alternative route to the study of the non-fiction genre. Parents are generally aware of the students’ goals, although not with equal certainty for every subject.

The one-to-one meetings between the principal and teachers, along with regular grade meetings, ensure that the focus on progress is sustained. Teachers discuss exemplar pieces of work in order to gain a common understanding of what constitutes high quality work. Articulation meetings are held to ensure that there is continuity between one grade and the next, and that there is no unnecessary re-teaching of topics. However, teachers recognize that there is some discontinuity between grades so that student learning and progress is affected. The work of the inquiry team has been particularly important in this respect in that it has identified areas of understanding which are lacking in upper-grade students. There is now a greater awareness in lower grades of the need to embed subject-specific vocabulary at an earlier stage in students’ learning.

Teachers and parents are closely involved in school-improvement planning through the school leadership team. They help write and monitor the Comprehensive Educational Plan, but they are also involved with other initiatives. Teachers expressed the faculty view that there was a need for a clear handwriting curriculum to ensure consistency across the grades. The leadership team researched a range of alternatives and the current curriculum was introduced. The school is very successful in communicating its expectations to parents and students, through meetings such as the curriculum night at the start of each year and through regular newsletter and electronic communications. The use of rubrics and opportunities for self- and peer-assessment provides students with clear guidance as to what is required to do well. The purposeful air in most classrooms shows that they clearly understand how effective learners behave and apply themselves.

**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.**

Students enjoy coming to school and are engaged by most of their classes, particularly those which allow them to work collaboratively or to have "hands on" experience. Experiments in science or practical activities in math, requiring the use of tape measures or manipulatives, provide opportunities for kinesthetic learners to reinforce their understanding. Teachers are aware of different learning styles and they provide a range of activities for the students, as well as encouraging accountable talk in pairs or groups to generate collaboration. Recent test results however indicate that the school has not secured the desired year-on-year progress. Teachers use their assessment information and their knowledge of the students to differentiate the instruction, but the degree of rigor necessary to accelerate the learning of students at all levels and grades is not consistently present.

The principal effectively utilizes the budget to support the instruction. The FOSS science kits for all grades ensure a continuity of teaching and assessment while also providing many opportunities for students to undertake experiments. Laptop carts help offset the absence of a computer lab and wireless connectivity in all classrooms allows access to the internet and a range of websites which support learning. Students comment very positively about working with them, as they do being able to use the Smartboards. This 21<sup>st</sup> century technology engages students' interest as they "make learning fun and help you remember things", as one student explained. There are very high levels of trust and mutual support in the school. This is evident in all inter-relationships, and students are well aware of what to do if there should be any problems. They all feel there is someone they can talk with and they speak meaningfully about using conflict resolution strategies if they feel bullied. The school successfully uses the Tribes curriculum for character development. The results of all this are purposeful classrooms and a calm, welcoming atmosphere around the school.

**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 well developed.**

The school is a genuine learning community, as is shown by the collaborative nature of the planning and the reflective practices which are encouraged by the administration. The administration effectively supports the teachers, many of whom have limited experience. The principal uses data, alongside his formal and informal observations, to identify areas for individual teacher development. He then ensures that professional development is available, and teachers confirm that their needs are normally met. However, the principal also encourages teachers to reflect upon their own practice. They identify individual goals which they discuss and agree with him. This process is not yet formalized into individualized plans with interim meetings to review the goals, but it has provided the framework in which teachers have gained the confidence to take ownership of their professional development. The grade meetings have a very strong

developmental focus, and are also the forum in which teachers turnkey their experiences from external training sessions. Staff developers provide instructional support. Six teachers are currently attending a Teachers' College Leadership Group to add to those already in the school. Observations, by the principal and others, indicate that these different approaches are effective in driving up the standard of instruction. There is also good support for teachers new either to the profession or the school, with the result that they soon settle into the school community.

The school is rightly proud of its focus on the development of the whole child. This is also very important to the parents, and has been a central factor in the growth of the school's popularity and increasing enrollment. Each class is associated with at least two outside arts organizations, and all grades have one or two "Enrichment Clusters" every week, a development which has also impacted positively on attendance on Mondays and Fridays when they are held. The links with the Guggenheim, "Studio in a School" and Mark Morris Dance School, among others, ensure that the curriculum has breadth as well as depth and that there are many avenues for students to pursue their personal development.

**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.**

Teachers regularly monitor the progress made by their students, although this is not consistent across all core subjects. The principal monitors reading-book levels five times each year and uses these as a key marker for student progress. Teachers' running records, student conferences and interim tests are also central to this process, as this data tracks students across the year. The data ensures that interventions are made quickly, whether to involve parents of students seen to be at risk or to provide extra challenge to those students working above grade level. The school leadership team monitors and revises progress towards whole-school goals. This process is, for the most part, effective and has identified many strategies for meeting the school's current challenges. However, there is not enough clarity in terms of what the key priorities should be in order to maximize the impact of the different initiatives.

There is a very clear vision for the school, which is shared and clearly articulated by all members of the school community. The principal and teachers see their role as developing the whole child, but also as creating lifelong learners with a deep-rooted appreciation of the arts and other subject areas. The whole-school planning, to further enrich the curriculum and to develop the additional rigor to challenge the students, indicates that the school has the strategies to continue to make the vision a reality.

# School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: The Robert Fulton School</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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?			<b>X</b>	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>
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?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<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 student’s learning.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

## 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, DYO, 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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X	

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