

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

The Ruby S. Couche School

Elementary School 030

126-10 Bedell Street

Queens

NY 11434

Principal: Dwayne M Crowder

Dates of review: February 3 – 4, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Diane Sharett

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Ruby S. Couche is an elementary school with 575 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 86% Black, 8% Hispanic, 4% White, 2% Asian and 1% American Indian or Alaska Native students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 93.2%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 62% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The principal has developed a nurturing and caring community where staff work tirelessly and mutual respect is evident between students and adults. One child stated, "Teachers work their hardest to do their best to try to help me." Hallways and classrooms abound with student work which celebrates their achievement. Teachers provide feedback on student work with positive comments followed by helpful suggestions for improvement. Consistent and clear expectations are evident across classrooms' genre boards and gallery walls that reflect the flow of work for the day. Coaches, mentors and the administration provide good support to experienced and newer teachers in literacy and math which improves instructional strategies and strengthens student achievement. Budgetary decisions support an appropriate curriculum and have widened the variety of strategies in use to meet the individual needs of students. The hiring of literacy and math coaches for classroom support is, for example, beginning to have a positive impact on student achievement.

The school has made good progress in developing a simplified data tracking system for literacy and math but has yet to extend this to cover social studies and science. There is more consistency in instruction because teachers use their common preparation periods or planning lessons together. However, teachers do not regularly use data to differentiate instruction, provide work that challenges all students or set clear and measurable short- and long-term student goals with timeframes for achievement across the core subjects. The school's analysis of data shows differences in the achievement and progress of ethnic and gender groups yet the administration has not made use of this information to determine what action to take to address these differences.

The school communicates high expectations to parents. Parents are invited every month to visit their child's class for "Parents as Learning Partners". Although they are willing to be more involved in the school, many parents cannot take up these opportunities because of their work schedule. Nevertheless, they do give their input for the Comprehensive Educational Plan and attend Family Literacy Night.

Good work is in progress to develop a database of academic interventions to help coordinate support for the subgroup of students requiring additional help.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is developing a learning community where students, parents, staff and administrators focus on student achievement.
- Budget decisions, particularly relating to the deployment of staff, are beginning to impact on student success.
- Mutual trust and respect between the staff and students promote an environment conducive to learning.
- The school communicates clearly to parents high expectations about attendance, behavior and student learning.
- Coaches and the administration support teachers very well.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all lessons meet the needs of the whole range of student achievement levels especially higher achieving students.
- Expand the simplified data tracking system established for literacy and math to all subjects and ensure that it is implemented by all teachers.
- Set and communicate goals for individual students' achievement and for groups of students that are measurable and have defined timeframes and use these in monitoring progress towards whole school goals.
- Establish plans for improving individual teacher's instruction with measurable interim goals and timeframes for evaluating success during the year.
- Ensure that the inquiry team identifies and spreads effective instructional practice

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The school collects, records and analyzes a range of data for literacy and math which helps staff understand student performance and progress. The system enables the school to analyze data for the whole class and identify which subgroups and individual students are underachieving. The school has made some use of the data, for example, to identify a downward trend in achievement of special education students in English language arts and underachievement among African American males, although the latter remains a challenge to staff.

The school focuses suitably on aligning instruction to the standards to increase student achievement. Informal running records and conference notes provide teachers with supplementary information to guide their instruction. Results from the Acuity test enable staff to identify strengths and areas of need, inform student grouping for instruction and keep parents up to date with student progress through a link to their home computer. Everyday Math unit assessments help teachers understand student progress and, as a result, tailor lessons more closely to student need.

The school has recently extended data collection to pre-kindergarten so that staff can monitor student progress over time. However, since the data tracking system does not extend to subjects other than English and math, teachers do not have a similarly focused approach to assessing achievement in other core subjects. Teachers do not, therefore, have a detailed knowledge of student achievement in science and social studies so that teaching in those subjects is often pitched at the whole class rather than at individual student need.

Attendance is monitored carefully and has improved. Frequent meetings by the attendance committee, analysis of attendance reports, identification of trends and initial and follow up letters to parents helped to improve attendance from 92.7% in 2006 -2007 to 93.3% in 2007-2008.

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 underdeveloped.

The school community, including parents and staff, works together effectively to create the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan. The school's goals from this plan are shared with all constituents. However, the school's plans do not address the needs of all students with sufficient rigor. For example, the school gives primary attention to

struggling learners but provides too little emphasis on the needs of students achieving benchmark status and higher performing students who are not advancing sufficiently. Staff do not have sufficient understanding of goal setting and, as a result, the school has not established sufficiently robust and differentiated long- and short-term goals across the curriculum with measurable and defined outcomes.

The administration articulates high expectations about behavior, student learning and attendance. For example, the school communicates regularly and effectively with parents about students' progress in reading. A progress report goes to parents three times a year explaining the results of the Directed Reading Assessment with their child's reading level, the level for the grade and suggestions to help their child improve in reading. This helps parents to understand how they can play a part in raising student achievement. The school is working on a parallel initiative for math. However, the school reports that not enough parents participate in school activities, such as Parents as Learning Partners due to their work schedules.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

Standards based literacy and math curricula are implemented across the school. However, although teachers take the teaching points from the standards, they do not offer amply challenging programs for higher achieving students or provide enough support for those in early grades who need extra help. While they maintain and review a range of data to guide instruction there is little evidence that it leads to school-wide differentiated classroom instruction. Nevertheless there is some effective practice: the staff is developing writing units with a writing consultant and is applying them consistently. The school displays student drafts on a gallery wall and genre boards in classrooms, forming attractive and informative displays across the school. The FOSS Science Kits are helping teachers to identify students' strengths and needs and improving the learning and teaching of science in grades 3-5. The school aligns most budgetary decisions with student need. Math and literacy coaches support classroom teachers in the America's Choice and Reading First Programs, co-teaching and providing classroom demonstration lessons. There is a broad range of opportunities in the arts for different grades including an arts cluster program and dance troupe which enhance student interest and engagement. Early morning services offer additional support in students' specific needs identified by their teachers. Nevertheless there are some instances where classroom resources are not sufficiently well targeted, and as a result, the choice of books is inadequate to maintain students' interest and raise their achievements.

There is a climate of mutual trust and respect between the students and staff which supports teaching and learning. Adults feel supported by the administration and each other and this fosters positive attitudes. The principal is visible in the building, and according to the staff is "very collaborative and has an open door policy."

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

Professional development is highly regarded by the administration and staff and teachers benefit from the strong support of the administration, coaches and mentors. The principal conducts formal observations, learning walks and informal observations of teaching, learning and room environment which help teachers recognize their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers meet together and learn from each other during common preparation periods and "lunch and learns". Weekly professional development on topics such as reading assessment, and writing and leveling books provides a forum for teachers to discuss their own needs as well as those of the school. One initiative has, for example, enabled teachers improve students' written work by encouraging them to systematically draft and redraft their writing. However, the professional development program is not tailored sufficiently to the individual needs of teachers. While a good start has been made in providing special education teachers with professional development on writing SMART goals, as yet, this training has not been extended to other teachers who need it. There are several valuable outside partnerships which help the school coordinate services for students with medical needs and provide a youth development focus within its arts program.

The inquiry team is well established and focuses on a group of low achieving fourth grade students who are multiple holdovers. The team has analyzed data on student performance in English language arts but has not placed sufficient emphasis on the impact of current instructional strategies on classroom learning. As a result, the team has not been able to influence and share successful practice.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The administration and faculty monitor trends of performance and, as a result, they have data to identify where instruction is not meeting student needs. However, this does not always have sufficient impact on instructional strategies. While staff assesses student performance regularly they do not use assessment information robustly and systematically to ensure that instruction helps every student progress. Too often students are given the same work regardless of their achievement levels, higher performing students are not sufficiently challenged and, as a result, these students underachieve.

All staff share the principal's vision of standards based instruction with autonomy for teachers and support the principal in monitoring the outcomes for individuals and groups of students. However, the weaknesses in the process of goal setting for students hamper the school's process towards achieving its vision. Although teachers have begun to identify personal goals in the Individual Education Plans for special education students the process is underdeveloped for general education students. The school has yet to develop measurable goals for all students in all subjects and suitable time frames and milestones by which to judge progress towards these goals.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The Ruby S. Couche Elementary School	△	➤	✓	+
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
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