

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

The Sunrise School

Elementary – Middle School 138

**251 – 11 Weller Avenue
Queens
NY 11422**

Principal: Nichele Manning - Andrews

Dates of review: November 5 – 6, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Jeffery Plumb

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Sunrise School is an elementary - middle school with 931 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 87% Black, 9% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 9% 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 93.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 72% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The school's curriculum is broad and relevant and students are encouraged to think critically and solve problems, an approach valued by parents. Although it is a caring school and parents value the 'family' atmosphere, not all teachers in grades 7 and 8 are approachable or have sufficiently high expectations of the students. The administration team work diligently to manage change and improve the quality of teaching, particularly in math in grades 7 and 8. They have the achievement of the students at the heart of all that they do and this is greatly appreciated by parents. There is a strong commitment, through targeted professional development, to improve differentiated instruction based on the use of student performance data, but inconsistencies in the quality of instruction have not been totally resolved. However, the vast majority of teachers have a clear commitment to improve their instruction to respond to the learning needs of the students in their class.

Skillful and reflective organizational decisions, based on data analysis, benefit special education students significantly. Higher-achieving students are not yet reaching their potential. Useful strategies are in place to address this, although it is too early to assess their effectiveness. The school is well resourced to enhance student learning, but again, it is too early to evaluate the impact of the significant investment in a new technology lab on student outcomes. Teachers plan their work well against benchmarks in English language arts, math, science and social studies, but this practice is not as secure in the other core subjects. Many teachers have shown initiative in finding effective ways of recording formative assessments that enable them to capture class and individual needs at a glance in a range of core subjects. They are not so effective at honing in on the performance of ethnic sub-groups, such as Hispanic students. An excellent electronic tool has been launched to support teachers in this type of analysis of student progress. Good progress has been made in shaping rubrics, but they are inconsistent in quality. They do not always provide students with clear signposts about what they need to do to improve their work.

Priorities identified for improvement are the right ones. Energy and passion on the part of the administration go into securing teachers' ownership and understanding of the key goals for improvement. Extensive professional development focuses on empowering teachers to be effective leaders. However, although structures are in place to facilitate evaluation of actions throughout the year, interim benchmarks are insufficiently specific.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has a relevant, broad and rich curriculum with a strong emphasis on the arts and physical education that actively involves students and encourages them to become reflective learners.
- The school's supportive learning environment enables students to take risks in their learning and deepen their understanding.
- Creative organizational decisions make a positive contribution to the achievement of special education students.
- Teachers are given many and rich opportunities to hone and improve their instructional skills through an extensive and relevant program of professional development.
- The school is well resourced, carefully organized and effectively scheduled to enhance learning opportunities for students.
- A good electronic system is in place to monitor student progress over time in English language arts, math and science.

What the school needs to do to improve

- Use data more effectively in all lessons to ensure that instruction is consistently differentiated to meet the needs of all students, and establish a consistent approach to providing students with very clear guidance about what they need to do to improve their work.
- Improve action planning and formalize interim benchmarks so that administration can monitor and evaluate the impact of decisive actions put in place on student achievement.
- Build on the systems in place to increase faculty involvement in whole-school planning and decision-making processes so that all share the school's vision and direction which focuses on raising achievement for all students.
- Sharpen the analysis of the achievement of different groups of students, particularly ethnic groups, and take decisive and robust action to raise their achievement.

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 has effective data management systems that enable administration and faculty to have a clear and up-to-date picture of students' progress and performance in reading, writing, math and science for grades, classes and individuals. An in-depth analysis to identify the reasons behind insufficient growth amongst grade 7 boys has resulted in decisive action to raise their achievement, but it is too early to evaluate the impact of the recently implemented strategies. However, the administration does not hone in sharply enough on how well Hispanic students achieve as a sub-group. A recently implemented software package, designed to improve the analysis of student performance, is intended to enable the administration to monitor how well different ethnic groups perform.

Specialist teachers keep a helpful range of information on students' achievement in each unit of work, but this is better developed in social studies than in art or physical education. The monitoring of progress, and the use of data to make timely adjustments to the curriculum and instruction in these subjects, are not sufficiently robust. The analysis of students' work by collaborative and regular meetings of faculty in grade teams has been introduced to help staff differentiate instruction, to accelerate learning and to raise achievement for individuals. However, these teams have not worked together on leveling pieces of student work so that all teachers within that grade have a common grasp of what a particular level looks like.

The administration is reflective and takes a collaborative approach to gathering, logging, analysis and use of data in most areas of its work. It rigorously evaluates assessment tools and recording systems to check that they are fit for purpose. Keen always to improve, the administration seeks to be more efficient and effective in its tracking of student progress over time. The administration, the coach and faculty customize or select interim assessments to align with the school's curriculum. Recording systems used by specialist teachers lag behind those used in English language arts, math and science. Although this work is in progress and moving in a positive direction, the systems in use do not yet sufficiently enable the teachers of social studies, art and physical education to target sharply what students need to learn to raise their achievement.

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.

This year the administration has taken decisive action and put robust systems in place to involve faculty more actively in the shaping and development of school goals. One teacher, reflecting the views of many, said, "This enables us to see how our work connects to the big picture." Almost all teachers are committed to the school’s overarching goal of differentiating instruction in all classes and matching work to students’ needs to raise their achievement. The school’s emergent written plan to achieve its goals to raise student achievement is developing well, but it is not yet clear precisely when and how progress towards these goals will be monitored and evaluated. Currently students are not sufficiently involved in setting their own academic goals, although the system used in English language arts, math and science to set goals for students to accelerate their learning at the end of each marking period is a secure start.

The school’s progress in establishing benchmarks in English language arts, math and science is better than in the other core subjects. Teachers conference with students on a regular and frequent basis about their reading, writing and math and use this model to set them immediate goals for improvement. However, the quality of these goals varies. Where this model works effectively, specific goals are set, taking account of students’ levels of understanding, and are used very effectively to raise student achievement, as was seen in a math lesson. ‘Smart’ goals are not yet in place to raise the bar for the highest achievers in the school, in order to challenge them and accelerate their learning. The administration has identified this as an area for improvement.

There is no formal system whereby teachers directly ask parents about what motivates their children as learners or what learning styles their children prefer. However, parents appreciate the school’s open-door policy, and say, "At any time we can see the teachers and find out how well our kids are doing." Student progress can be checked on-line, but not all parents know that if they do not have a computer at home they can access computers in school for this purpose. The school has increased the frequency with which teachers communicate with parents, but parents say that the structured and scheduled parent/teacher conference meetings are better in the elementary school than the middle school. Parents find the report cards they receive to be helpful in enabling them to understand their children’s strengths and the areas in which they need to improve. Parents say, "We greatly appreciated the back-to-school workshop because it really helped us understand the curriculum."

The school’s senior leaders and faculty communicate high expectations in tangible ways, but not all of their teachers have high enough expectations for them, a point echoed by students in grades 7 and 8. The diverse range of student work displayed in corridors and classrooms reflects the richness of the curriculum and links to specific learning processes, such as using math to solve real-life problems. Full attendance is celebrated and absence is rigorously followed up. Overall, student behavior is very good, except in a pocket of the middle school where the teaching is dull and lacks challenge. The majority of students know what their learning goals are and, in some cases, they are adept at determining exactly what they need to do to raise the level of their work. However, there is inconsistency across classes and subjects. Students say that where their teachers use good rubrics they know what they need to do to improve their work, but that not all rubrics used are helpful to them.

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 curriculum is relevant and broad. It actively engages students in the learning process and enables them to be enthusiastic learners. They gain in independence and think critically as they solve problems. Overall, relationships between students and teachers forge a secure environment where students feel safe to take risks and make new discoveries as learners. They are confident to ask profound and searching questions of their teachers, which enable them to become deeper learners. However, grade 7 and 8 students say that not all of their teachers are approachable in this way.

Based on data and careful reflection, the administration has made modifications to the curriculum to accelerate student learning. Improvements in science exemplify a commitment to deepening student learning through an enquiry-based approach. Displays of student work chart how students solve problems and develop skills required in the workforce. The school has a clear commitment to meeting the needs of students with special education needs. Astute decisions have been made by the administration to ensure that suitable support systems for these students are in place and enable them to accelerate as learners and achieve well.

The administration has involved grade and specialist teachers in implementing benchmarks for all units of study across the curriculum. The intention is to create a framework that ensures progression in all core subjects with the right level of challenge for all students. However, this breaks down in grades 7 and 8, because teaching does not consistently differentiate activities to ensure that all students, particularly higher achievers, are sufficiently challenged. Senior staff work ceaselessly to equip teachers with the skills required to plan for differentiation in their lessons, but inconsistency in practice remains across 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 proficient.

A wide range of professional development is aligned with the school's goals. It focuses on improving the quality of teaching and learning in order that teachers more effectively match work to students' needs and so raise their achievement. There is an emphasis on empowering teachers to become leaders in their classrooms. Effective use is made of the school’s coach and district staff to support teachers through targeted professional development. However, the administration does not yet rigorously monitor and evaluate the impact of professional development strategies on the quality of outcomes for students. The rubric used in the school to monitor teaching and learning is good. Emotional intelligence is built into the lesson observation process, because teachers’ reflection on themselves as practitioners is integral to the model used. Constructive feedback from senior leaders to teachers is beginning to improve instruction.

Grade teams meet regularly, supported by the coach, to develop rubrics and plan differentiated instruction. There are encouraging signs of communication between and

within grades, but there are no formal regular cross-grade meetings to improve planning for progression across grades. Meetings between class-based teachers and specialist teachers take place, but there are insufficient links between subjects.

The school candidly admits that it is still seeking effective ways to develop the inquiry approach. The inquiry team made inadequate progress last year because it did not sufficiently involve class teachers of the target population and it did not ask enough inference-type questions of the target group. The method used to raise students' achievement in reading did not enable them to draw meaningful conclusions about the students' progress.

The school looks outwards to enrich its curriculum and better meet student needs. Effective use is made of the Black Spectrum Theatre to involve students in the performance arts. Partnership with Omega Psi Phi provides male role models to work with boys to accelerate their learning.

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.

The school's priorities for improvement are accurately based on an evaluation of its strengths and areas for improvement. The administration, following an analysis of the Learning Environment Survey, has put in place robust structures to improve collaborative dialogue between faculty, parents, students and administration to shape the goals in the emerging new Comprehensive Education Plan.

The administration, parents and the vast majority of faculty work towards the same overall aim. Overall, the faculty works in a dedicated and committed manner to achieve the school's goals. These goals are based on an accurate analysis of what needs to be done to improve instruction, accelerate learning and raise student achievement. Teachers are rapidly honing their skills in using a range of assessment information and tools to track students' progress, which informs goal setting at several levels. However, the school's approach to long-term strategic planning is not sufficiently rigorous. Goals are broadly right, but sometimes it is not clear what specific data has shaped them. Planning lacks clear, evaluative tools to measure the impact of actions taken on student outcomes. The school monitors progress towards goals at regular intervals, but the lack of measurable benchmarks at specified times throughout the school year means that administration does not sufficiently evaluate the extent to which they are on track to achieve their goals, or take decisive action to modify them midterm if they are not.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The Sunrise 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, 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	
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