

Quality Review

Report

2008-2009

The Robert Randall School

Elementary School R373

91 Henderson Avenue
Staten Island
NY 10301

Principal: Ilene Goldstein- Harnett

Dates of review: May 4 - 6, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Denis Pittman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Robert Randall School is an elementary school with 399 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 6. The school population comprises 35% black, 22% Hispanic, 39% white, 2% Native American and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 84% of the students enrolled and girls account for 16%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007-2008 was 91%. The school is not in receipt of title one funding.

The school is located across six sites and comprises students who are drawn from the whole of Staten Island. Approximately 56% are identified as emotionally challenged. This group follows the mandated curriculum and takes standardized tests. In addition, there are students experiencing autistic spectrum disorders and a small group with complex learning difficulties. These students, who constitute 44% of the enrollment, take alternate assessments.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The new principal has given a sense of purpose and direction to the school. Her collaborative style of leadership is progressively engaging more staff in creating an increasingly positive learning environment in the school. The school is calmer and more orderly which is building a greater respect for students and their needs. Parents appreciate these changes and feel that the school now provides a more supportive and nurturing environment. Staff work hard to encourage parental engagement, providing them with daily information in order to share incremental changes in the behavior and accomplishments of their children. The school effectively collects, utilizes and evaluates data about students' individual performance in most core subjects, but collating progress in social studies and performing arts is not as systematic. Teachers use the information successfully to identify students who are not making appropriate gains and then implement effective remedial or support strategies. The school gathers information about the performance of subgroups such as English language learners and the comparative achievement between boys and girls. A behavior management program is being implemented successfully, resulting in improving students' social awareness and in helping to create greater trust in the school. There are high expectations about attendance levels, which are above average.

The school has a flexible curriculum based on an array of specialized programs which are geared to the learning requirements of students. Many students are making significant gains in their function skills as a result of these programs and the differentiated strategies employed by teachers. However, teaching for those students who are standardized assessed is not always so well matched to their individual learning needs. Students are not always entirely sure about all their learning goals. Teachers use technology imaginatively to support students with communication difficulties. Teachers have access to a wide range of relevant professional development, whereas training for paraprofessionals is less coherent. The introduction of robust administrative systems and cohort meetings, to enable common planning, is helping promote greater consistency across the sites.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The new principals' clear vision for the school and collaborative leadership are successfully promoting greater clarity of expectations and a purposeful commitment to students' academic, social and personal development.
- The school has a substantial range of curriculum programs to provide flexible approaches in promoting skill development and conceptual understanding.
- The school's good systems to promote personal and social growth contribute to effective behaviour management and an increasingly calm school environment.
- Teachers use technology effectively to enhance students' acquisition of functional skills and promote a variety of learning opportunities.
- The extensive range of professional development opportunities ensure staff have relevant specialist skills and knowledge to help the students move forward.
- Increasingly, staff provide exemplary role models to the students on how to work together successfully as a team, which also helps promote a climate of trust and respect.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop procedures for assessing student progress in the performing arts and social studies and introduce a method for collating achievement in all core subjects for teachers' data binders.
- Ensure that teachers of standardized assessed students always match lesson activities precisely to the full range of needs and capabilities in the class.
- Give a greater focus to raising student awareness of their learning goals and what their next steps in learning are.
- Continue to develop the role of paraprofessionals through training and promote the collaborative nature of their work.

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 is effective in collecting a wide range of information about individual student, class and grade performance and progress in reading, English language arts, math and science. However, it does not yet provide teachers with collated achievement data in all core subjects.. Similarly, it does not yet collect detailed information across other subject areas such as social studies and the performing arts. The school analyzes data on the basis of student subgroups. The analysis of gender, for example, shows that in the older grades girls are performing slightly better than boys in most subjects. While the school has a relatively small number of English language learners, it is conscientious in analyzing the data routinely to identify where improvements are necessary.

Teachers compile and utilize baseline data well. A profile of English language arts and math is generated for standardized assessed students using the Early Childhood Assessment System [ECLAS], Foundations and Everyday Math. This profile enables staff to plan prescriptive individualized instruction programs for each student. Staff regularly measure progress against individual education program targets. Continuity of assessment practice is actively promoted through the transfer of all student portfolios from the previous year to the new teacher in September. This procedure is facilitated by the uniform nature of student portfolios which contain artifacts of student work. For those students who have alternate assessments the baseline data is compiled using Bergance, which gives a systematic assessment of academic achievement, fine and gross motor skills and communication.

The administration identify potential 'hotspots' effectively via the daily collection of information about students' behavior. As a result, the incidence of more serious infractions has been reduced significantly. Staff respond quickly to absence by daily phone calls, sending out postcards and home visits. As a result attendance levels have been gradually improving and attendance is above average for this type of school.

Parents receive formal monthly progress reports as well as daily updates on their children's progress, through communication books. These procedures enable parents to be constantly informed about their children's successes, problems and well-being. Parents feel that communication in general has improved significantly since the arrival of the new principal.

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.

Teachers set appropriate targets for individual students through their individual education programs, including reading, math and social competences. Structured collaborative procedures for creating individual student goals involve related service providers, parents and paraprofessionals. Currently, there is a lack of clarity in setting timeframes for achieving short-term objectives. Staff review academic and personal goals formally each marking period and set targets for managing and improving behavior through a program called the Power of Choice. The related short-term goals for English Language Arts and math are in the form of intervention checklists which are revisited three times a year. The school does not set detailed goals for all other subjects.

Collaborative procedures involving the administration, staff and parents generate the school-wide goals set in the school's Comprehensive Education Plan. The plan goes through a number of revisions with the various constituents until there is a final agreed version. In this way, the school community has a sound understanding of the school's current strengths and areas for development. The leadership team monitors progress towards goals routinely, as specified in the plan, through monthly meetings and adjusts the action plan as necessary in order to meet stated objectives.

Staff hold regular formal and informal conferences with students and their families about the individual goals that are set. Nevertheless, students are not always fully aware of all their learning goals and what they have to do to achieve these. For the technically aware parents the administration has created a 'blog' (the Virtual Parent Teacher Association) to share and post information. In consequence, increasing numbers of parents have a better understanding of what they need to do at home to support their children's progress. The school has high aspirations and expectations for its students, a message which is conveyed through focused assemblies on behavior and displays around the school. A particular area of concern was the efficacy of dismissal procedures. The involvement of older students as role models helps teach younger students how they should behave when leaving the school and on buses.

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 provides a broad range of activities to promote students' intellectual, emotional, academic and physical growth. All standardized assessed students are engaged in the New York core curriculum with modifications as indicated on the IEP and based on continuing assessments. For students who learn through different modalities the school provides hands-on activities, including use of manipulatives, and other modifications to promote learning. The picture exchange communication symbols [PECS] are of great benefit to students with limited verbal communication. The variety of programs such as Project Arts, Physical Best and 'Cookshop' offer flexibility in curriculum opportunities to provide skills to meet the specific needs of individual students.

The principal allocates the budget judiciously to provide a wide range of programs to support instruction. This commitment provides relevant resources to enable staff to plan and implement differentiated instruction, although this not always evident in practice. In addition, there is significant expenditure on technology coupled with relevant staff training to support these endeavors.

The good relationships throughout the school produce a happy environment for learning. Teachers work well with paraprofessionals to deliver the planned programs, which support the academic and personal development of students. Students feel safe in the school and believe that the teachers care about them. The concern and respect staff show to each other provides a good role model for students to emulate which is evident in the interactions of the children.

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.

The administration is proactive in providing focused professional development within school and staff attend external training in order to improve the students' learning experiences. For example, the school is piloting a program in the use of an augmentative device to promote speech (Dynovox). Staff were provided with relevant training in the use of the device and how to implement the program through the use of a Smartboard. The specific needs of individual teachers are identified on the basis of lesson observations, teachers' self-assessment and collaborative discussions between staff and administrators. These discussions inform suggestions for improvement and what might be relevant training. Teachers say they value this support they receive and that this has had a positive impact upon their teaching practice. The mentoring of new staff is also effective in this respect. Teachers have appropriate opportunities to share ideas about teaching approaches through an increasing number of inter-visitations. As a result, some of the benefits of the introduction of augmentative devices have been shared with staff to explore the relevance of the program in different contexts. The strong collaborative element is also reflected in the effective work of the Inquiry Team.

Staff work well in collaboration with families and other service providers, such as speech and occupational therapists, to provide relevant care and support for families who require it. In a broader context individual students who are falling behind receive timely and frequent interventions from the school counselors, so that difficulties can be resolved.

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.

Staff meet regularly and make effective use of collated data to evaluate students' individual performance. An example is the way in which the administration and teachers systematically monitor annual IEP goals to enable staff to identify precisely if students are still on track to meet their individual targets and to take remedial action as required. These routine collaborative procedures provide a context for joint approaches to be used in giving support. The review cycle process is further illustrated by the regular meeting of the data inquiry teams to evaluate the outcomes of assessment and implement modifications where necessary. The school plots interim benchmarks for class, grade and school-wide goals in reading, English language arts, and math, and these are identified in the Comprehensive Education Plan. The school does not yet have these benchmarks in place for all other content areas, or all the subgroups in the school.

The administration meets every week to discuss and evaluate the school's progress and focus on specific initiatives. For instance, it is monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of adaptive equipment to improve student learning to justify and further inform budgetary expenditure. The impact of the training in the use of ARIS data has similarly been monitored to gauge the impact upon planning and instruction.

The new principal's collaborative leadership style has facilitated a change in the culture of the school. The open communication has ensured members of staff are more involved in curriculum and instructional development. These changes are appreciated by the school community. The principal makes herself accessible to parents in order to communicate how well the school is doing and what next steps for improvement are. Parents value these opportunities and are impressed by the discernible progress being shown within the school and by their children. The principal's vision for the school is providing it with a new purpose and determination to continue to improve.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The Robert Randall 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.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	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.							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	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.							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	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