



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

**Quality Review Report
Office of Accountability
2008-2009**

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

David A Stein Riverdale Kingsbridge Academy

Middle School - High School 141

**660 W. 237th Street
Bronx
NY 10463**

Principal: Lori O'Mara

Dates of review: December 1- 2, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Denis Pittman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

David Stein Riverdale Kingsbridge Academy is a Middle/High school with 1280 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 13% Black, 48% Hispanic, 27% White and 11% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 15.4% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 92.6%. The school does not receive Title 1 funding.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The school is well led by an able administration team. A shared vision is effectively promoted with other members of the school faculty. Collaboration and support are strong features of the school. The development of curriculum units and new assessment processes such as progress tracking sheets are enabled through the extensive commitment of all members of the school community. The work of the school is well supported within a variety of contexts such as study groups and Inquiry Teams. This level of engagement enables staff to identify closely with the aims and objectives of the school. Sustaining effective communication with parents is high on the school's agenda. Accordingly, parents and students are made aware of the school's high expectations in relation to attendance, behavior and academic performance. The school has well-established systems for communicating with parents about the progress of their children. Parents value the mutual respect and trust which exist between students and staff at the school.

The school monitors the achievement and progress of its students well. However, the detailed monitoring of skills and competencies is not yet fully established in subjects such as physical education and performing arts. The data on the achievement and progress of specific subgroups such as students with special education need is extensive. This enables the school to provide effective support through remediation and intervention strategies which successfully promote student progress. However, the same rigor has not been evident in monitoring the progress of higher achievers students, particularly in grade 8. This work is now an appropriate focus of an Inquiry Team. In general, achievement levels of most students are high. There is, however, a lack of consistency in the way that achievement grades are presented by individual teachers which inhibits comparisons between work samples.

The curriculum is challenging and provides a breadth of learning experiences for students. Students enjoy their lessons and are able to explain what they are doing and what they have learnt. After-school enrichment programs successfully accommodate students' other interests and learning requirements. Teachers are hard working and fully committed to the personal and academic development of their students. There is an increasing focus on achieving learning goals. However some action planning is not sufficiently precise in identifying interim check points for monitoring progress. Resources are used well to promote student learning.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Special education students in grades 6 through 10 make good progress because the school identifies and meets their needs well.
- A strong collaborative culture has been created which promotes staff development through engagement in goal setting and sharing of professional expertise.
- The positive, supportive relationship between teachers and students promotes a productive learning environment for students.
- There are rigorous systems for collating and interpreting data which effectively underpin the monitoring of the work of the school.
- Professional development and individual mentoring programs for staff make a significant contribution to the quality of outcomes of the school.
- The school has developed a stimulating and challenging curriculum which promotes student engagement and achievement.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop strategies and utilise current data to promote the progress of higher achieving students in English language arts, particularly those students in grade 8.
- Improve the coherence and consistency of assessment information through extending the use of software programs for grading and adopting a common format for presenting the information.
- Improve action planning by specifying individual responsibilities and identifying interim benchmarks so that the monitoring of progress towards goals is more robust.
- Develop strategies and procedures for assessing skills and competencies in core elements of the curriculum, specifically physical education and performing arts.

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.

Data collection, in relation to the achievement and progress of individual students and groups, is systematic and detailed. The analysis of this data is effective. For example, the school's analysis highlighted an unacceptably high failure rate in the Regents Living Environment Course. In response, baseline information was used effectively to regroup students to reflect levels of proficiency and provide relevant intervention strategies. The informed way in which staff use data is reflected in the improving levels of achievement being shown across all grades in the middle school and credit accumulation in the high school. There is, however, a lack of consistency in the way achievement grades are recorded by individual teachers and this inhibits comparisons between work samples. Data is used particularly well to identify the needs of special education students and English language learners, resulting in special education students making better-than-expected progress. However, higher achieving students in English language arts, specifically in grade 8, are not making expected levels of progress. The school has begun to address this issue by making it a focus for the Inquiry Team. The subsequent analysis of data has identified the students' inability to make inferences from texts as a weakness amongst this cohort of students, an area that the school now plans to address.

An individual profile of student achievement is effectively compiled through the use of recently introduced "progress tracking" sheets which reflect achievement outcomes as well as specifying learning goals. Teachers in each of the disciplines complete these sheets regularly, supplementing the data with a detailed identification of competencies via the Acuity software program. This comprehensive profile forms the basis of detailed discussions with parents at conference meetings. The progress reports not only identify whether expectations in subjects have been met but also give some indication of the effectiveness a students study habits. The extensiveness of the information provided to families promotes good levels of parental engagement with their child's learning.

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 well developed.

There are clearly established procedures for engaging the faculty and parents in the identification of school goals. Most core subjects use formative and summative assessments to develop goals for their respective disciplines and goals for students. However, this process is not formalized to the same extent in physical education and the performing arts. The school has refined its procedures for identifying goals to be

included in the Comprehensive Education Plan. Formerly these emerged from subject departments but now a greater array of accountability data is used such as surveys, previous quality reviews, the principals' performance goals and the progress report. In response to the analysis of 2008 data, the school effectively identified a need to enhance reading proficiency in the middle school. This led to an action plan relating to curriculum changes, providing books which address gaps in vocabulary and developing the use of periodic assessment. The matrix of meetings involving subject staff, grades and faculty provides a number of forums which ensure that overarching aims are shared with teachers. As a result there is a clear understanding by everyone about the issues facing the school and about its future direction.

Through a good variety of communication processes such as newsletters, parent-teacher conferences and e-mails the school clearly conveys its expectations about attendance and behavior. The progress-tracking sheets are an informative medium for engaging students and families in the process of understanding and developing learning goals. The outcomes of periodic assessments which identify students' specific skills and competencies in English language arts and math are also routinely shared with parents. Parents confirm that they appreciate the greater level of understanding this gives them about the specifics of their children's learning and progress. This level of detail enables parents to help their children with the next steps of their learning. Progress reports encourage students to reflect on their achievement and be proactive in identifying their learning goals through self-assessment. The above average attendance levels are a positive indicator of students' engagement with the school's expectations and objectives.

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 challenging and provides a breadth of learning experiences. Using its data on student achievement, the school assigns students to honors programs or general education courses, whichever best meets their needs. In this way the school is able to build appropriate levels of rigor into its courses. The specific needs of special education students and English language learners are effectively met through specialized programs. In the middle school, higher achieving students have the opportunity to take accelerated courses in math, science and foreign languages. In consequence, some students can take a Regents examination before entering the high school. A greater range of electives, including world religion, literature and business finance, is now offered in the high school. These courses provide extra stimulus and motivation that successfully engages students in their education.

The school places an appropriate focus on differentiated instruction. Many teachers are adept at using the school's extensive data sources to plan and deliver lessons that they gear to the specific needs of students and this leads to increased student progress. Lessons include a variety of activities for students at different levels of ability and, in one grade 6 English language arts class, the teacher took this a step further by differentiating work according to students' learning styles. However, data shows that higher achieving students are not being challenged effectively in English language arts in grade 8, because these students do not make expected levels of progress.

The budget is effectively used to promote the learning needs of students. The curriculum for students with special education needs is well resourced, with appropriate

materials, so that students can remain in general education classes and not be pulled out of lessons. The financial commitment to the introduction of an extra lesson at the end of the day has effectively enhanced the learning of English language learners and “resource room” students.

High levels of mutual trust and respect between parents and the school are reflected in survey results. Parents endorsed this view at the parents meeting. The school works productively in promoting parental involvement through regular newsletters and workshops. Open communication is a strong feature of the school culture. This is evident in the school's protocols for learning walk-throughs and visitations to classrooms which promote ‘transparency’.

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 has tailored a professional development plan for each teacher. This is built up through a systematic program of lesson observations and review of students work. Teachers are actively involved in creating their own learning goals at the start of the academic year. Staff are well supported in promoting these goals through one-to-one discussions with the assistant principal responsible for staff development. A specific focus for all staff has been training related to promoting the concept of the “differentiated classroom”. This emphasis is indicative of the collaborative approach that the administration successfully engenders in the school. This strategy is also exemplified by ample opportunities for staff to be engaged in and learn about the work of two Inquiry Teams operating in the school. The positive strategies being utilized in studying the sample groups had been effectively communicated to the remainder of the faculty.

Scheduling constraints do not afford many opportunities for common planning. However, there are numerous occasions where informal meetings take place between teachers to ensure consistency and continuity in the teaching of curriculum units. The engagement of staff in these collaborative procedures, allied to their concomitant responsibilities, is indicative of the administration's commitment to distributed leadership. The school is effective in building capacity for improvement, for example by supporting staff through a mentoring program. Opportunities for inter-visitations and involvement with “learning walk-throughs” promote good opportunities for reflection about professional practice. Staff confirm that these activities are extremely helpful in promoting their professional competencies.

In a broader context, the collaborative orientation of the school is reflected in its strong community links with Riverdale Community Center. The range of clubs, activities and academic interventions provided are a significant factor in promoting additional learning opportunities for students. The students enrolled on the remediation program showed significant gains in achievement in subsequent assessments in math and English language arts.

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 well developed.

The school has effective and rigorous procedures to identify strengths and areas for development in the curriculum and instruction and set goals for improvement. Some subject teams have expanded and extended their use of data to set interim goals, for example in science, social studies, foreign languages and art classes. Subsequent reviews enable staff to make timely adjustments and improvements. Nevertheless, some action plans do not specify individual responsibilities, timeframes and interim checkpoints and, as a result, progress towards goals cannot be gauged adequately. The administration routinely monitors instruction and the learning outcomes of students in lessons and uses this information to make recommendations for professional development or revisions to the curriculum which improve student learning. For example, the effectiveness of lab work in science was enhanced through ensuring that students undertook a more thorough preparation process in preliminary lessons. The findings of study groups and Inquiry Teams are routinely discussed and have an impact upon practice within the school. For example, the findings of last year's Inquiry Team influenced the decision to create an after school program and provide supplementary instruction in geometry. The outcome has been reflected in improved results this semester.

The school is self-reflective and utilizes the data it has generated effectively. The formative assessment and progress reports which are created enable the administration to monitor the outcomes of specific classes and thereby the effectiveness of individual teachers. It uses this data to systematically evaluate the impact of professional development initiatives and make adjustments accordingly. The school makes positive responses to challenges. For example, as a consequence of recent budgetary restrictions the school has created a "grant writing" committee to explore new avenues for financial resources. This reaction is indicative of the commitment of the faculty to sustain the quality of education provided at the school. The drive to maintain and improve outcomes is a product of the shared vision held by all the school community.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: David A. Stein Riverdale Kingsbridge Academy	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>	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?			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>	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?				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.

<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
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>	△	➤	✓	+
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>	△	➤	✓	+
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							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed