

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

Seth Low School

Middle School 096

**99 Avenue P
Brooklyn
NY 11204**

Principal: Denise Sandra Levinsky

Dates of review: May 17- 18, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Isabel DiMola

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Seth Low is a middle school with 1,020 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 16% Black, 22% Hispanic, 26% White, and 35% Asian students. The student body includes 21% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 94.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Seth Low Middle School, in its second year under new leadership, is transitioning to focusing on using data to understand and respond to individual and groups of students' needs. School leaders are very adept at collecting and analyzing data to understand school trends and target areas of need. This leads to strategic decision making in using resources to maximize impact on student learning and progress toward learning goals. Student and teacher programming is purposeful and after-school programs respond to targeted student needs. Effective use of data helps to set school goals and engage parents in school decision making. Various initiatives exist to communicate high expectations and foster increasing parent involvement. Project Boost allows parents to participate in museum and restaurant visits that celebrate cultural diversity and develop strong relationships between families and the school. As a result, parents are becoming increasingly comfortable in voicing their concerns, participating in school leadership, and knowing what is expected of their child.

Teachers are beginning to analyze data from formative and summative assessments to understand student needs, however, there are varying levels of ability of teachers in effectively using data garnered by assessments to influence student learning. The principal has a clear vision that instruction is for individual students, and the job of an educator is to "teach children not classes." However, the capacity of teachers to implement rigorous instruction that differentiates, engages, and promotes critical thinking for all students is uneven. As a result, there are missed opportunities for students to engage in higher-level learning.

Teachers have multiple opportunities to engage in professional development to support their pedagogic skill and make progress toward professional goals. Consultant and supervisory support is broadening teacher capacity. Teacher teams engage in inquiry, however, the practice is emerging. Teachers and supervisors are engaging in professional development to support their knowledge and effectiveness in using inquiry as a tool of fostering school-wide change. However, informal structures and varying degrees of competence in evaluating the effectiveness of inquiry work limits the impact the work is having on improving student outcomes.

The school has a strong belief in caring for the whole child. To that end, effective partnerships with community organizations and in-school guidance services provide social-emotional support to students and families. An in-school initiative, such as "Respect for All" provides students with tools to expand tolerance, remain intolerant of bullying and violence, resulting in an improving school tone and reduction of disciplinary incidents.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Leaders make informed and highly effective organizational decisions that align with school goals and support efforts toward improving student learning.
 - Stagnating progress of high achieving grade 6 students in English language arts, prompted mid-year programming changes creating double-period blocks of instruction. This gives students opportunities for additional support within the school day resulting in students making progress toward learning targets.
 - To support English language learners that have not improved English proficiency in several years, an after-school program collaboratively taught by teachers licensed in English language arts and English as a second language affords students with well-matched differentiated instruction designed to meet their needs allowing forward moving toward reaching their goals.
- School leaders collect and analyze a wide range of data to understand school trends and the progress of groups of students resulting in programs that meet the needs of all students.
 - School leaders collect data from ARIS, Acuity, and formative and summative assessments to understand the needs of the school leading to a clear focus on allocating resources to all students, with an eye towards those in the greatest need. For example, a “New Comer” class allows English language learners to build preliminary English skills necessary to make progress in the standard curriculum. Clear benchmark targets and ongoing assessment determines student readiness for inclusion into the school’s regular program and provides the school with ongoing data relative to the program’s effectiveness.
- Differentiated professional development opportunities that meet the needs of individual teachers support teacher growth and reaching school-wide goals.
 - Teacher participation in a multitude of professional learning opportunities supports pedagogic practice and addresses individual needs for professional growth. Consultants work yearlong with teachers in defined cycles thus focusing on the specific needs of teachers. As a result, teachers are making good progress toward their professional goals as evidenced by formal and informal observation and student learning outcomes.
 - Grade-level ‘lunch and learns’ provide teachers time to meet and share best practices. Faculty members that attend outside professional development share their learning with grade and/or subject area colleagues. Teacher intervisitations allow for demonstration lessons and opportunities for teachers to support each other’s growth. Consequently, there is ongoing communication between administrators and faculty on instructional strategies that are successful as well as a collegial model for teacher development.

- School leaders develop highly effective partnerships and engage faculty to support the social-emotional growth of students toward improving student outcomes.
 - Successful partnerships with community organizations provide students and families with resources to improve the social-emotional health of students. The 21st Century grant provides an after-school program for students to receive academic support, enrichment programs and participate in individual, group, and family counseling, designed to improve self-esteem and increase participation in school. As a result, attendance is improving and students are making progress toward learning targets.
 - An effective pupil personnel team offers professional development to teachers on integrating social-emotional supports within classes. Workshops on identifying and preventing bullying, and whole school participation in “Respect for All” programs provide teachers with tools that influence student behavior. As a result, incidents of violent behavior and disciplinary issues are decreasing.
- School leaders collaborate with the school community to develop school-wide goals that drive efforts toward improving student outcomes.
 - School leaders are proactive in ensuring that parents are active participants in school-wide decision making. Efforts to engage parents include Project Boost that provides trips for families to different museums and restaurants celebrating different ethnicities. Participants have the opportunity to interact with school personnel in an informal setting, thereby opening communication that carries over to parent association meetings, participation on the school leadership team and other venues, that give parents voice in the school. This results in a common belief of high expectations and a growing sense of partnership between families and the school.
 - School leaders have structures in place to ensure that parents are aware of the high expectations for students and are actively engaging in their children’s education. An effective parent coordinator collaborates with the parent association to ensure that all parents have access and understanding of ARIS Parent Link as a tool to support their children’s learning. An automated phone system calls homes daily with updates on school events. Teachers outreach to parents, and individual meetings with students, ensure that there is understanding of goals, expectations, and progress over time. As a result, families and the school unite in their support of students in progressing toward reaching learning targets.
- School leaders and faculty regularly evaluate instructional and organizational decisions and modify when necessary positively affecting student outcomes.
 - At weekly team meetings, school leaders analyze student data to measure effectiveness of instructional strategies on targeted student outcomes. Thorough analysis of data with a school-wide and disaggregated lens allows for evaluation of the effectiveness of instructional decisions and suitable modifications in a timely manner, thereby having maximum impact on student achievement.

- Ongoing review of student outcomes, by grade, subject area, subgroup, and program, allows school leaders to evaluate the effect of organizational decisions. Thorough analysis of weekly assessment data for at-risk students in math, led to restructuring of a weekend math academy to ensure curriculum alignment to student needs. As a result, targeted students are advancing toward reaching their goals.

What the school needs to improve

- Widen professional collaborations that use an inquiry approach to analyze student outcomes and provide teachers with opportunities to participate in key decision making that influences student learning.
 - Teachers across grade and content areas are beginning to engage in inquiry work. However, faculty capacity to use inquiry as a tool to identify relationships between instructional strategies and student outcomes is just emerging. As a result, there are limited opportunities for these teams to participate in decision-making that affects learning across the school.
- Formalize structures that evaluate the effectiveness of teacher teams in improving student outcomes and affecting school-wide change.
 - Although members of a core inquiry team and school leaders observe teacher teams, there are only informal structures in place to evaluate the effectiveness of each team's work and impact on student outcomes. Supervisors are only beginning to understand how teacher team's and inquiry work can be a force of change in the school and therefore, do not yet have the capacity to effectively monitor the practice and progress of teams or to determine their impact on overall school progress.
- Develop classroom practice that provides students with rigorous, differentiated instruction ensuring high levels of student engagement and the development of higher order thinking skills.
 - Differentiated instruction is beginning in some classrooms. However, it is not a consistent practice throughout the school. Although students are engaged in their learning, levels of rigor and opportunities for high order thinking are inconsistent. As a result, high achieving students are not being challenged resulting in missed opportunities for them to progress to the next level of learning.
- Deepen the level of analysis of periodic assessment data to measure student progress and to provide feedback to students and families toward improving student outcomes.
 - Periodic assessments in all content areas are given at specified times throughout the school year. However, not all faculty members are adept at using the assessments to understand student outcomes and effectively adjust practice to impact learning for students and groups of students. Consequently, there are pockets of incoherence between assessment results, goals, and action plans, that impact student learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: K096 Seth Low School	△	▷	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			X	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				X
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?			X	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?			X				
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X				
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		X					
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?				X			
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals 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 progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		X					
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed