

# Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**Rachel Jean Mitchell School**

**Elementary - Middle School 137**

**121 Saratoga Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11233**

**Principal: Loria Tucker**

**Dates of review: January 27 - 28, 2010**

**Lead Reviewer: Deena Abu-Lughod**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Rachel Jean Mitchell School is an elementary - middle school with 368 students from pre- kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 80% Black, 16% Hispanic, 1% Native American/Pacific Islander, 2% White and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 90.7%.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.**

The Rachel Jean Mitchell School is advancing well in its plans to create a coherent instructional program, allocating the requisite time and resources. A vibrant arts program includes music, dance, art, and theater, which sustain student interest, and teachers collaborate to make cross-curricular connections. However, the quality of curriculum planning and instruction in other core subjects varies considerably across the school, and differentiated instruction is an emerging practice.

A competent inquiry team analyzes performance trends for the school, manages and aggregates assessment data in the upper grades, and now monitors student progress by class. The school's improvement goal is not differentiated by grade or subgroup, and there is no similar system to monitor progress in the lower grades. Teachers' skill at using a widening range of data is improving, and some use data very effectively to plan instruction. Teacher teams, facilitated by newly appointed teacher leaders, generate creative solutions to instructional problems, and the administration is open to their suggestions. However, the inquiry process is at an emerging stage, and the school is still developing protocols to examine and reflect on data, student work, and teacher practice. There is no rigorous analysis of behavioral data to allow the school to plan better to support students' social and emotional needs.

A professional development plan aims at enabling all teachers to use the workshop model, differentiate instruction and integrate technology. There is evidence that teachers are applying their new learning. This planning preceded the teacher goal-setting initiative, and internal observation tools do not align with the training plan or teacher goals to help the administration monitor the impact of these new initiatives. The school's leaders observe practice regularly but do not systematically consider student work to connect its support more closely to teacher needs and student outcomes.

Although the school regularly provides information to parents, and teachers reach out frequently, parents are not sufficiently involved in decision-making or activities to learn how they can assist their children's learning. Suggestions often involve using websites and tutors, but there is little sharing of detailed information about student skill strengths and next steps so that parents' good will can be put to optimum use. Students report discomfort asking for help in front of their peers, but teachers are always available to assist them. The use of rubrics is increasing, but the quality and quantity of comments on work is not yet sufficient to help students understand their next learning steps and manage their own learning with confidence.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school manages and schedules space and resources well so that teachers can collaborate and students can enjoy a rich array of courses, including the arts, that increase their engagement in learning.
  - o Teachers on the same or similar grade levels have two common periods a week that they use well to plan instruction, share experience, and receive support from lead teachers and network specialists.
  - o Budget allocations, grants, and external partnerships sustain field trips and clubs that supplement the arts-rich curriculum that motivates students. The theater program in the grade 6 literacy block, which elevated student engagement and commitment to learning, has expanded to an additional grade, with equally promising results so far.
- Teacher teams gather and analyze a range of school-wide data to help them understand and act upon the students' areas of need.
  - o The data inquiry team leads the school's efforts to identify meaningful data sources in grades 3-8 and trains staff in its use. This year, it used the item analyses of the State tests and Acuity to enhance the school's understanding of its strengths and weaknesses in relation to particular literacy and math skills. Some teachers immediately reinforced instruction on the most challenging skills, and they intend to use this new source to evaluate their curriculum.
- The school has developed a system to organize and display English language arts and math data so it is accessible for decision-making and is used to identify student need.
  - o The data inquiry team organizes information by classroom, and color-codes students' levels on summative and periodic assessments so that school leaders are able to identify trends and schedule supports for students who need them. These charts appear on the principal's data wall and in classrooms to stimulate teachers' use of data.
  - o Many teachers manage their own information well, and document student mastery and progress so they can reflect on the effectiveness of their instruction.
- A data-informed needs assessment drives the school's improvement plans, which the leadership and faculty implement together to build a shared commitment to the school's goals.
  - o Analysis of performance and survey data resulted in action plans related to curriculum, assessment, special needs, inquiry, and continuous school improvement. All teachers belong to an implementation committee, and some teachers are now included in the cabinet so that there is better communication and unity of purpose between administration and faculty.

- o In response low attendance rates, the principal instituted an award system to acknowledge the parents' contribution. The principal attributes the current year's 2% improvement in attendance to this initiative.
- Professional development supports the improvement plans to create a common instructional focus and good pedagogy.
  - o The school has pursued support for teachers to improve instruction and student engagement through training on the workshop model, differentiated instruction, and technology. The impact of SMART Board training is evident in classrooms where students find that the visual support helps them stay focused and keep good notes. Most teachers now use the workshop model and teachers serving students with individual education plans are now coordinating responsibilities to improve outcomes.
  - o Teacher teams meet weekly to share observations of student academic and social behavior, and to refine their understanding of assessment and data use so they can begin to set goals for students and plan for differentiated instruction.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Develop the curriculum using existing good models of unit planning to build coherence in what is taught and how, so that all students have access to a standards-based and rigorous course of study.
  - o While many teachers are developing new curricula that thoughtfully connect essential questions to content and skills, the school does not expect this of all teachers. There is great variation in the quality of planning, so not all students benefit from high-quality curriculum and instruction.
  - o The school expects teachers to use "Skill of the Week", but there is no evidence of supporting materials, consistent implementation, or guidance on how to connect the skills to learning objectives. When implemented, students are confused about what skill to apply and are sometimes instructed to use strategies ill suited to the genre or the aim of the lesson.
- Use updated assessment data to differentiate lessons with attention to skill needs, to support and challenge students at different levels and help them identify their next learning steps.
  - o Differentiation of instruction is an emerging practice, and there are significant differences across classrooms. Some teachers use item-level data to vary assignments so that students work at the appropriate level of challenge, and use rubrics that clarify expectations and increase independence. In other classes, students work on the same task individually, and the absence of scaffolding, guided practice, checklists, and norms for group work creates too much dependence on the teacher.
  - o Out-of-classroom supports for students often consist of self-paced, computer programs and homework help. Data is not systematically used

to group students by specific needs for more focused small group work during class or extended time.

- Refine goal-setting practices to accelerate student growth, monitor progress and help parents understand them so they can support their children's next learning steps.
  - o The school's goal is to attain a 4% increase in the percentage of students who are proficient. It does not differentiate goals by subgroup, and does not push to accelerate learning in the lower grades where outcomes remain well below those in the upper grades. Some teachers use data to develop interim targets and identify next learning steps for students, but others require additional guidance and training to do so effectively.
  - o The school offers parents general recommendations regarding study habits, websites and tutors, but parent workshops are infrequent. Goal setting for students is not specific enough to help parents understand how they can best support their children's learning. While many teachers communicate the specific skill needs revealed by the increasing array of assessments, this is not a uniform practice.
- Align classroom observations to the school's instructional focus and teacher goals so that feedback is actionable, promotes reflection, and leads to measurable improvement of practice and student outcomes.
  - o There are regular observations, but feedback to teachers often focuses on details, such as whether the aim was too broad, and do not specify next steps or encourage reflection. Monitoring tools have not been updated to align with the school's priorities or the professional teaching standards that some teachers use for their own goal setting. As a result, feedback does not generate enough momentum towards achieving the school's stated instructional goals.
  - o Leaders do not evaluate systematically the quality of work produced across classrooms to help establish a common understanding of rigor or to ensure that teachers receive effective supervision and targeted support aligned to their students' needs.
- Develop clear expectations and measurable goals collaboratively with all constituents related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and behavior to monitor progress on all initiatives and revise plans as needed.
  - o The school conducted an effective annual evaluation, which informed ambitious changes this year, and it intends to conduct a mid-year check. However, action plans do not include interim benchmarks to clarify where it may need to make adjustments or could celebrate success.
  - o Expectations of behavior vary by classroom, and there is no uniform ladder of referral. Students and parents report that classroom disruptions reduce a focus on scholarship. The administration has not analyzed the logs of events to determine frequency over time, place, or cause to see whether the new positive reinforcement policy, teacher training, or its guidance procedures are having an impact.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Rachel Jean Mitchell School	Δ	▷	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>		X		
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	Δ	▷	✓	+
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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		X		
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	▷	✓	+
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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X		

<b>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.</b>							
<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					
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>							
		X					
<b>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.</b>							
<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					
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>							
		X					
<b>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.</b>							
<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					
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>							
		X					
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>