

# Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**Russell Sage**

**Middle School 190  
68-17 Austin Street  
Queens  
NY 11375**

**Principal: Marilyn Grant**

**Dates of review: April 12 - 13, 2010**

**Lead Reviewer: Jeannette Reed**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Russell Sage is a middle school with 795 students from grade 6 through grade 9. The school population comprises 7% Black, 25% Hispanic, 37% White, and 31% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 95.0%

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

Russell Sage is a school where students are interested in learning and motivated to excel. Students stated their teachers are there to help and encourage them to use different strategies to solve difficult problems. Students feel their teachers push them to do their very best. The interaction between students and adults is very positive, and the school's environment is both welcoming and nurturing and one in which parents and students acknowledge the school culture is one of mutual respect.

The principal is working hard to create a community that is intent on using data to improve instruction and meet student needs. The school analyzes a wide array of assessment data, which affords teachers an understanding of student needs, yet this is not yet extended to setting clear interim benchmarks and outlining next steps in learning. Additionally, differentiation of instruction is still not a well-established practice school-wide. Teacher teams meet and although the school has identified suitable school-wide goals to strengthen practice and accelerate student learning, interim- and long-term goals are not precise enough. The principal is making good efforts at creating a school-wide instructional focus, but strategies to determine the impact of professional development are not yet sufficiently in place. As a result, its impact on student outcomes cannot be accurately determined by administration. In addition, action plans and benchmarks do not have specific time frames for on-going evaluation to assess impact for student and staff.

The school has developed many collaborative partnerships with organizations such as the Queens Museum, Urban Advantage, and the Queens Community House Beacon Program that offer students an opportunity to apply and extend their learning and enhance academic and social development.

Parents are embraced as an integral part of their child's education and development. Parents are active in the parent association and are fully involved in participating in the school leadership team and part of the decision making process. School administrators and the parent coordinator offer ongoing support for parents in the form of workshops geared toward understanding the interpretation of ARIS reports, preparing for specialized high school and intervention strategies geared toward understanding adolescence. The strong home school connection has resulted in increased involvement in the education of their child.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Good relationships among students, teachers, and parents sustain high standards and pride in the school community.
  - The school exhibits a culture of trust as well as a safe and nurturing environment where all members of the school community feel supported. One teacher commented, “Our principal has an open dialogue with us and we feel supported as a result and are not afraid to take risks.”
  - Students are assigned to an assistant principal, dean, and grade-specific guidance counselor, and therefore are well known by several adults in addition to their content area teachers. This has resulted in students feeling safe, respected, and important.
- Parents are key partners in their children’s education and are kept well informed of school programs and their children’s needs.
  - The school offers parents many opportunities to be partners in their children’s learning. Parents participate in a variation of instructional workshops that include ARIS Parent Link, math and English language arts, as well as strategies to deal with adolescence. One parent commented that the adolescence workshop helped her cope with some sensitive issues at home.
  - Parents feel they are partners in their child’s education as active members on the parent association, and that they are kept informed about school activities. The school’s use of well-varied communications such as phone master, school website, Russell Sage newsletter, and an online progress report system, provides comprehensive ways to share school-wide information and child specific academic information.
- The principal and staff convey high expectations to students and families, thus impacting positively on student outcomes.
  - Parents’ participation on the school leadership team enables them to give input on the school budget and programs, resulting in parents becoming an essential part of school’s decision-making process focused on improved student achievement.
  - The principal’s visibility, approachability by all school constituents, along with on-going conversations with teachers, parents, and students, allows her to continually share the school’s high expectations. Students echoed that the principal encourages us by telling us “how smart we are and how we must use the strategies we learned and always aim for the highest goals.”
- The principal utilizes a multi-prong approach for the purpose of teacher self-reflection, to identify relevant professional development, and adjust instructional practices.

- The principal's scheduling of individual one-on-one meetings with teachers, including pre- and post-observation conferences, is supportive of implementing the Measures of Effective Teaching Project. She also relies on informal observations and attendance at selected teacher team and grade meetings to review teaching standards, resulting in staff formulating teaching practices that are aligned with State standards and school goals.
- The principal's daily visits to classrooms followed by discussion or informal write-ups with written feedback to teachers enables her to identify individual needs of staff so that instruction is enhanced school-wide.
- Effective support services provide support for families and opportunities for students to grow academically as well as socially.
  - Partnerships with organizations such as the Queens Museum, Urban Advantage, Empire State Partnerships, and the Queens Community House Beacon Program, effectively engage students in extracurricular activities that expand their learning experiences and advance their skills. The Queens Museum partnership afforded the school an opportunity to participate in "Museum Night" where students were able to display their art projects. Many teachers, parents, and students attended the event.
  - The parent coordinator offers workshops for parents to explore a deeper understanding of adolescence behavior and positive parenting strategies. The school's guidance counselors provide valuable youth services by addressing the social-emotional needs of students.
- The school uses data to understand students' needs.
  - School leaders and faculty gather summative data, including item skill analysis from State examinations, and classroom level content area examinations to identify needs of students and look at student performance.
  - Teacher teams meet by content area to engage in collaborative inquiry. They review student outcomes to ascertain the level of student engagement in learning. Teachers find this process is serving to keep them focused on finding what works best for each child, to share best practices, and make adjustments as needed.

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

- Deepen differentiation of instruction so that lessons engage students and offer suitable challenges that are geared to extend their learning.
  - The school's instructional practices are not consistently aligned to the workshop model thus limiting multi-entry points for students in classroom lessons. Limited scaffolding of lessons was evident in some classes for enrichment while there was insufficient rigor for other students, which results in inconsistent goal setting practice and teaching strategies to maximize student progress.

- The school utilizes data to establish benchmarks; however, this has not yet translated into school-wide practice of teaching relative to each student's level. As a result, many students do not receive sufficient challenge to address their individual needs.
- Create a strategic plan to ensure teachers receive suitable guidance through teacher teams and support staff to improve student outcomes.
  - The school does not yet schedule sufficient time for teacher teams to meet, nor is there evidence of teams across all subjects and grades, thus limiting effective classroom goal setting to improve student learning.
  - The school does not efficiently use support staff to assist teachers in setting and monitoring explicit goals for student learning and planning of instruction.
- Strengthen the alignment between school goals and teacher practice to promote greater engagement and differentiated strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners.
  - Precise goal setting for identified students is not yet embedded. Analysis of student learning outcomes does not consistently drive the setting of differentiated goals. As a result, timely supports to accelerate individual student learning cannot be properly implemented.
  - Many teachers use textbooks and worksheets assignments to assess skills and competency in subject classes. Authentic work products that demonstrate students' understanding of the lessons is not consistently evident.
- Deepen and expand the practice of setting, revisiting, and revising goal setting in critical areas, as a means to connect the use of data and professional development with improving outcomes for students.
  - Teachers prepare engaging whole-group lessons, but are not consistent in their use of formative assessments to help in their understanding what students know and are able to do. As a result, students' next learning steps are not clearly defined, and therefore they cannot consistently move to the next step in their learning.
  - The school does not yet have clear interim benchmarks against which to measure the professional growth of staff. Limited opportunities for individualized professional development, and the lack of on-going monitoring to evaluate its impact on improving classroom practices, hinder understanding its impact and making needed adjustments to improve pedagogy.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

<b>School name: Russell Sage Middle School</b>	△	▶	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<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>	△	▶	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			<b>X</b>	
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?		<b>X</b>		
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?		<b>X</b>		
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<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>	△	▶	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

<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>