

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

Robert F. Kennedy Community High School

High School 670

75-49 Parsons Blvd.

Queens

NY 11366

Principal: Ira Pernick

Dates of review: February 25 and March 1, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Jeffrey Soloff

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Robert F. Kennedy is a high school with 665 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 14% Black, 32% Hispanic, 27% White, and 27% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for the other 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 89.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Under the leadership of a strong, visible principal, the school has evolved into a learning community that supports the academic and personal growth of students. A student summed up the views of many when saying, "Teachers are understanding and help us with our personal problems." This safe, nurturing school includes a 200-hour community service component for graduation that helps to produce well-rounded students that are ready for college. The school is in the process of increasing the rigor of the curriculum to better challenge all students. Technology is widely used throughout the school. Teachers make extensive use of the 140 laptops as a way of expanding the resources available to students and to find ways of making learning more interesting.

The administrative team analyzes a wide range of data in order to evaluate organizational decisions, staff deployment, and professional development. Collaborative team teachers are now connected to certain special education students for English, math, and social studies classes so that they can provide continuity of instruction and establish a closer relationship with the students. Although most teachers are involved in the inquiry process, the school has not set learning goals and benchmarks so that subgroup progress can be evaluated. Without these goals, teachers are not meeting the needs of all targeted students.

Administrators regularly perform unannounced observations in order to be well informed about teacher practice. Observation data drives future professional development. The focus, instructionally, is on improving the use of differentiation so that teachers can meet the needs of all students. Despite the emphasis on this strategy, only some teachers currently differentiate content and methods regularly which means that not all students' needs are met.

The school keeps parents well informed about programs and student progress through its website, an online grade book, frequent emails, newsletters and phone contacts by teachers. Parents speak about the "homey" feeling that the school exudes. However, the school does not provide interim progress reports or give students clear next steps for improvement. This lack of information limits the parents' ability to help their child raise their achievement level and prevents students from knowing what they have to do to improve their grades.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal makes informed and effective organizational decisions that align with the school's instructional goals and promote improved student learning outcomes.
 - The principal has scheduled multiple opportunities for teachers to collaborate in order to analyze data, assess student work, and share effective strategies. Students do not attend first period classes on Thursdays thereby enabling all teachers to meet with colleagues from other grades and departments in order to share information about students and discuss which instructional strategies can best lead to improved student learning outcomes.
 - Creative scheduling allows for many hour-long periods across the day, providing concentrated instructional time for students. In order to improve the learning outcomes of special education students in collaborative team teaching classes, the special education teacher travels with her students to English, math, and social studies classes to provide continuity of instruction.
- The school has a nurturing, safe environment where students enjoy a high level of support in their personal and academic development.
 - Students confirm that they are comfortable talking to teachers about personal and academic problems because teachers, in this small high school, know them as individuals and care deeply about their well being. Guidance counselors work closely with students to support their academic and social growth and provide appropriate college information. This has led to greater academic success as well as high attendance.
 - The extremely positive culture, driven by a dedicated leader, is characterized by a high degree of student engagement in most classrooms. Students feel comfortable speaking to the principal about school concerns and say that he "hears them and wants to make the school better for them." The principal works closely with the student government so that students have input into many school decisions.
- The school provides extensive individualized support and differentiated professional development so that teachers can learn about effective teaching methods and revise their instructional practice to better meet student needs.
 - Professional development opportunities are aligned with the school's goals and focus on the Essential Elements of Instruction philosophy. A contracted consultant is working on a one-on-one basis with fifteen teachers to refine and hone their skills so that teachers provide better instruction for students and improve their learning outcomes.
 - The principal provides individualized professional development for teachers in order to focus on observed deficiencies, such as questioning techniques and data analysis, so that lessons can be structured purposefully. Teachers engage in peer observations in order to improve

their instructional practice and, in turn, develop their own practices which result in higher levels of student achievement

- The school has established structures for monitoring teacher practice with a clear focus on deepening adult learning in order to improve instructional practices throughout the school.
 - The highly visible principal spends a significant portion of his day visiting classrooms and carrying out informal observations. Frequent oral and written feedback informs teachers of the quality of their work. As a result, the principal is able to provide individual coaching sessions for teachers as well as plan for future professional development activities that support differentiated classroom instruction.
 - Recommendations for improvement are monitored by informal observations that take place within a week of the formal observation. This is done to ensure that teachers are making the adjustments that are necessary to maximize student learning and that good practice is increasingly consistent.
- The administration consistently and regularly evaluates the effectiveness of organizational decisions, interventions, professional development, and staff deployment and makes frequent adjustments that improve student learning.
 - School leaders use a wide range of assessment data and classroom observations to evaluate the effectiveness of staff assignments. Data is currently being analyzed to determine if a change in the use of collaborative team teachers is making a positive impact on learning outcomes.
 - The administration is building teacher leadership capacity by sending teachers to workshops and using them as turnkey trainers for the rest of the staff. Administrators monitor collaborative teams and professional development sessions and provide feedback that is helpful in further developing teacher leaders.
- The school effectively communicates high expectations to students and their parents regarding academics and behavior thereby raising the awareness levels of the entire school community.
 - The school communicates high expectations to parents and students through its website, guidance department, and emails in an effort to raise the school community's awareness of programs and goals. A parent confirmed that the school "lets us know what is expected of our children and keeps us informed about their progress."
 - Parents are involved in decision making through the school leadership team and feel strongly that their "voice is heard and taken into account" when the principal makes decisions. Results of the Learning Environment Survey indicate high levels of parent engagement.

What the school needs to improve

- Promote greater consistency in differentiating instruction based on data so that lesson planning reflects purposeful groupings, students are challenged, and tasks accommodate different learning styles to maximize learning.
 - While some teachers differentiate instruction, it is not yet an embedded practice across all classrooms. Some class lessons are more generic and do not meet the learning needs of all students.
- Establish measurable short- and long-term goals for subgroups and targeted students to enable the school to effectively monitor student progress, make adjustments, and reinforce accountability.
 - The school has not created data-informed interim goals across subject areas in order to effectively measure and evaluate subgroup progress. In the absence of focused student goals, teachers provide generic activities for targeted students that do not meet their specific needs.
 - The school has not yet clearly established benchmarks that support teachers in gauging student progress over time and this thereby inhibits teachers' efforts to make changes in classroom practice that could improve student learning.
- Provide consistent feedback to students with detailed reasons for their success and clear next steps to help them achieve their goals.
 - Few teachers send progress reports home to parents. This lack of information about how their child is doing as well as failing to indicate next steps for improvement hampers parents' ability to pinpoint way that they can provide support at home.
 - Teachers do not work with students to develop practices that would enable students to reflect on their work or evaluate their own progress. This inhibits students' efforts to elevate the level of their work.
- Continue efforts to make the curriculum more rigorous so that all students are challenged to reach their potential.
 - Although the school is in the process of making the curriculum more rigorous, higher achieving students are currently not being challenged sufficiently. An analysis of math data indicates that report card grades are higher than Regents grades. The principal is working well with teachers to tackle this weakness, which results in some lessons where students lose interest and are not motivated to give their best effort.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Robert F. Kennedy Community High School	Δ	▶	✓	+
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>	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
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>	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	
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