

# Quality Review Report 2010-2011

**Robert McNair School**

**Elementary-Middle School Q147**

**218-01 116 Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11411**

**Principal: Anne Cohen**

**Dates of review: May 19 – 20, 2011**

**Lead Reviewer: Lenon Murray**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Robert McNair School is an elementary/middle school with 861 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 91% Black, 4% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 7% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 94.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders and faculty make coherent decisions that align the curriculum to State standards and target all learners to improve student performance.
  - The school has modified their curriculum to make literacy the foundation of all inter-disciplinary teaching. They have met on teams and aligned maps with the State standards for reading, writing, listening and speaking. Additionally, they have purchased materials that support their initiatives in the core subject areas and have revised units to reflect that support. This has resulted in an increase in academic vocabulary knowledge among their students.
  - Teachers use curriculum maps to provide a detailed framework within each subject area and as a guide against which to examine student work to develop lesson plans that actually address student needs. This has resulted in most students in the small and large student groups feeling supported and motivated in their classes and identifying their school as a place where they improve and grow. The student folders reflect their engagement and effort.
- The school leadership makes thoughtful, strategic organizational decisions that support the school's instructional goals to improve student outcomes.
  - In a difficult budget environment the principal has retained the literacy coach and invested in a computer application that supports teacher assessment of student reading progress and addresses literacy deficits. The administration has also kept an art teacher who works with the primary grades combining art with literacy. As a result teachers have implemented a balanced literacy model that has increased student reading skills.
  - The scheduling of common planning time during the school day makes it possible for teacher teams to meet regularly to refine lessons and units. The middle school English language arts (ELA) teachers develop poetry units that analyze the works of contemporary poets while ensuring that students write their own poetry. This has resulted in more challenging academic tasks and assignments for students.
- The school leadership and faculty align assessments directly to curriculum and analyze student data to enable teachers to adjust instructional decisions in their teams and classrooms to increase performance.
  - The school's faculty, in collaboration with administration, utilizes a range of student performance data that include Acuity periodic assessments and unit assessments in literacy and math to inform lesson planning. Teachers take responsibility for monitoring their own progress by comparing student performance on a variety of assessment results to ensure alignment between their teaching and the learning of their students. Middle school students show a performance gap between boys and girls in literacy, particularly writing. Teachers have re-taught the targeted boys in basic writing skills. This practice has facilitated earlier intervention with struggling students who receive more targeted support in the classroom and extended day tutoring.
  - Students complete unit assessments and teacher-made assessments in ELA and math at the conclusion of each unit of study to assess the knowledge and skills mastered during the instructional cycle. Teachers in elementary grades

have continuously adjusted their teaching of fractions to address student deficits. This practice has resulted in greater alignment between classroom assignments and the curriculum goals that were initially established to improve students' achievement.

- School leaders use classroom observations and student performance data to improve instructional practices and promote teachers' professional growth.
  - A majority of the school's teachers develop professional goals that align to student needs and State standards. School leaders conduct informal observations and some formal observations to provide individualized feedback to teachers on their practice. This has led to consistent efforts by teachers to improve their level of instruction.
  - School leaders provide a range of supports to teachers that include individual conferring, collaboration with network coaches and specialists, and mentors for newer teachers that promote teacher growth. Assistant principals meet frequently with teachers they supervise and provide tailored feedback. This has resulted in increased reflection among teachers and their belief that they are constantly improving based on the improvement of their students.
- The school has a clear vision of its future direction that is reflected in its focused, data-based goals to increase student achievement over time.
  - The school has developed goals that emphasize student growth in ELA and math. They also recognize the importance of nurturing their professional learning community and dealing with the issues around the creation and maintenance of a safe, positive school environment. This has created cohesiveness in the school's efforts at academic improvement.
  - The various constituencies of the school including the parents, faculty and students have contributed to the school's needs assessment as it was discussed by the School Leadership Team and in parent association meetings. The school leadership meets regularly with the middle school students in town hall assemblies to elicit their views. The leadership and faculty of the school are diligent in understanding where the school specifically needs to improve particularly in literacy. The awareness of the school's needs has led to goals that have led to some improvement in student performance.

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

- Continue to develop consistent beliefs about student learning that are aligned to the curriculum and differentiated to meet all students' learning needs to increase their achievement.
  - The school has a foundation in balanced literacy and teachers emphasize literacy and reading skills as the basis for imparting content knowledge. Teachers use a workshop model of teaching a mini-lesson followed by supervised practice and then independent practice. Although teachers are quite competent at direct instruction, differentiated learning opportunities are not consistently offered to students leading to large numbers of students struggling to be challenged across grade levels.
- Increase the information sharing and open communication with students and families with relation to students' learning needs and outcomes to increase parental participation.

- Teachers provide families a flow of information by sending home reports on assignments, assessments, and behavior. These reports are at the discretion of the teacher and include phone calls, emails, notes in student notebooks, and letters. The parent coordinator has been arranging parent workshops about ARIS Parent Link, the learning environment survey and the curriculum. However, these workshops have been poorly attended and parents report that they are only aware of their child's performance when they are struggling, which has led to a low level of parent participation in the academic life of the school.
- Expand the use of collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups and struggling students to increase achievement.
  - Teachers have reviewed assessment results after units and have set some performance goals for individual students particularly during conferring. However, these goals are not updated in a timely manner and do not identify which students need additional supports. Teacher teams look at data for struggling students but do not consistently use this information to set goals. As a consequence, goal setting at the classroom level does not sufficiently drive achievement.
- Improve the integration of youth development, support services and community partnerships with the school-wide goals to refine the academic and social growth of students.
  - A dean for grades 6 to 8 supports the assistant principal and teachers as they work with the middle school students. The school lost the support of an after-school program that relocated in the community and a rites of passage program that targets adolescent males, works with a limited number of students. Teachers receive limited professional development on the sustenance of a safe, supportive learning environment. As a result, suspensions have not been reduced and learning environment survey results have not improved.
- Establish clear and consistent structures that can provide timely feedback on the effectiveness of the structured professional collaboration and capacity-building in the school to drive instruction.
  - The school has established grade-aligned teacher teams which utilize student data and provide frequent opportunities for teachers to reflect on student needs. This has resulted in teachers developing multiple interventions and supports including individual and small group interventions. However, the school does not yet consistently utilize specific school-wide protocols and appropriate action research to analyze the effectiveness of teacher teams thereby limiting their impact on instruction.
  - Distributed leadership is visible in some teams, particularly in the elementary grades. However, it is not yet deeply embedded in all collaborations, and is limiting the independent success of all teams. The school is developing systems to monitor distributed leadership but they are not yet institutionalized. Assistant principals regularly visit teacher team meetings and send teachers to professional development on leadership outside the building. The result is that teacher leaders are reluctant to take active roles without requests by administration.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2010-2011

<b>School name: The Robert McNair School</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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>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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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 Align assessments to curriculum and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, 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>		

**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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?		<b>X</b>		
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?		<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.**

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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?			<b>X</b>	
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?		<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.**

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?		<b>X</b>		
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		<b>X</b>		

<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>