

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Ron Brown Academy

Middle School 057

**125 Stuyvesant Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11221**

Principal: Celeste Douglas

Dates of review: October 17 - 18, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Evelyn Santiago

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Ron Brown Academy is a middle school with 239 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 80% Black and 20% Hispanic students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 87.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

What the school does well

- The school is a nurturing community where parents, students, teachers and staff work as a highly unified team to grow academically and socially to ensure student progress. (1.4)
 - After review of information gathered from the school's Learning Environment Survey, the school created a Teacher Advisory Council where each teacher serves as an advisor to groups of students. The council focuses on maintaining a safe and orderly environment by building trust via the school's "open door" policy that encourages students to seek help in addressing issues that may arise. The council also facilitates interventions and counseling services for targeted students to support their academic, social and emotional growth. Students have input in school-wide events through participation in the 'Student Ambassadors Program' where they represent their school at venues such as the Middle School Fair and volunteer for school-based jobs to help the learning community. Additionally, the 'Counseling in Schools Program' provides mentoring services for students and training for teachers through the arts. These efforts have led to a reduction in the number of student incidents and suspensions and a significant increase in student attendance from 87% last year to over 91% so far this year.

- The school's organizational decisions are aligned to its goals to support improvement initiatives and increase student learning. (1.3)
 - In support of the goal of increasing overall literacy and math performance by 5% - 10%, and address students' academic needs, the school uses technology-based instructional tools such as Read 180 and I Ready Math, respectively. The school uses Read 180 to address the level of fluency in literacy for struggling readers and using the Data on Reading Assessment (DORA) system, assesses reading levels on an ongoing basis. Additionally, the school uses 'I Ready Math' to improve math skills and increased the use of Smart Boards and computer laptops as classroom tools to enhance instruction. Consultants were hired this year to support teachers with planning and delivery of instruction. Preliminary data and feedback from teachers and support staff indicate that these additional resources are yielding moderate improvements in teacher planning and practices, thus increasing student progress in these areas.
 - Time is allocated for teachers to meet at least once a week to collaborate at grade level and subject area inquiry teams. Some teams are focusing on phasing in the common core standards and others are implementing instructional experiences that include more scaffolds to address student needs. As a result of these interactions, teachers try a greater variety of instructional strategies and more students are engaged in learning.

- The school is supportive and inclusive of families as key partners of the school community which ensures collaborative efforts towards meeting student goals. (2.4)
 - An active parent body collaborates in developing and participates in several monthly meetings at the school. Parents co-plan and develop the school's Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) as members of the

School Leadership Team. The Parent Executive Board works with school staff to review curriculum and co-plans events to support monthly curricular topics; and the Parent Arts Committee creates initiatives related to strengthening the school's arts program, this includes acquiring a half million dollar grant to fund school programs in visual arts, theater and music. Collectively, parents express that they feel like integral members of the school community working toward improving learning and enhancing educational experiences for all students.

- The school shares learning expectations and information on student strengths and weaknesses with parents via monthly workshops and newsletters. Parents receive curriculum maps which show what their children will be and are learning at various times throughout the year. Monthly progress reports, goal sheets and the school's online grading system, Engrade, informs parents of the strengths and weaknesses of their children. Workshops and curriculum events, such as Curriculum Night, help parents understand how their child is performing, relative to what is expected of their child. As a result, parents have a greater understanding of what their children know and don't know, and express that they are now able to help their children at home with homework and curricular projects.
- The school uses collaborative processes in the creation of goals and action plans in order to improve instruction resulting in increased student achievement. (3.1)
 - As a result of student outcomes, the school has developed long term goals and action plans in literacy and math that emphasizes the integration of the Common Core Learning Standards that are evident in the school's Comprehensive Education Plan. The school is focused on increasing the number of students at proficiency in ELA and math by at minimum 5%. There is a particular focus on reducing the number of students at Level 1 by at least 5% in both ELA and math. To do this, the school is focused on teachers knowing the strengths and weaknesses of their students and modeling thinking strategies as part of their lessons. These focused goals provide teachers and staff a clear path for overall school improvement.
 - The principal uses a variety of structures to engage teachers, parents, administrators and staff in the goal setting process. Administration engages teacher leaders, teacher teams, cabinet members, parents and students at regularly scheduled meetings collaboratively analyze school data and student outcomes. Based on this information, the group sets goals and develops plan for improvement. Consequently, there is consensus on expected outcomes and confidence among constituents in their capacity to influence student growth.
- Systems and partnerships provide support to create nurturing environment that ensures growth in students' academic, personal and social development. (4.4)
 - Guidance personnel collaborate with teachers whose students are identified in need of additional support to plan lessons and discussions that foster the students' academic and emotional development. The

school handbook articulates a ladder of referral and provides guidance on ways to interact with students; and, all teachers attend workshops that focus on using classroom management strategies within the lesson. In addition, teachers receive guidance on how to support the school's social-emotional initiative, Respect for All Program, to ensure understanding and consistency of implementation. Consequently, students express that they "feel cared for", safe and want to come to school.

- After analysis of student data in English language arts and identifying the need for vocabulary and literacy development, the school extended its collaboration with outside organizations. These include the Museum of Contemporary African Art that features the school's student art work at the museum, 'Broadway Junior' that works with students to produce original plays and 'Count Me In', a voice program that helps students with language skills to prepare for high school auditions. Additionally, students participate in the Medgar Evers College 'Robotics Program' and go on college tours in preparation of college readiness. Parents, staff students noted that these real world experiences tap students' talents and learning styles and promote academic vocabulary and higher levels of self expression, thinking and learning. Consequently, a review of students' preliminary data and high level of student participation in these programs indicate an increase in academic skills and appreciation for the arts.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen the alignment of the school's curriculum to State standards so that academic tasks consistently promote higher order thinking and ensure all students make progress in their learning. (1.1)
 - The school has identified vocabulary and writing as key areas of need and created curriculum maps in all subject areas supporting these foci. Also, some academic tasks, embedded in those maps, engaged students in higher order thinking. However, in review of student work, several academic tasks were not aligned to the school's curricular focus areas. In addition, the curricula implemented across the school do not consistently offer supports or extensions for all students, including students with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs). This inhibits the ability of teachers to coherently engage students in rigorous tasks that expands their thinking, thus limiting student growth.
- Promote consistency in differentiated instruction so that lessons reflect purposeful groupings to maximize learning for all students. (1.2)
 - Teachers offer students a variety of written and oral prompts and tasks based on assessed reading levels and learning styles to engage them in the learning. However, this practice of using questions and tasks is not consistent across the school. In several classes visited and work folders reviewed, it was evident that students worked on reading and completing teacher developed worksheets that required little to no discussion or required higher order thinking skills. As a result, the ability of all students, including ELLs and SWDs to think creatively and apply the learning to meaningful activities that generate in-depth understanding and learning is hindered.

- Ensure that assessments practices align to instructional decisions and provide teachers a clear picture of students' strengths and needs in order to ensure learning and progress for all students. (2.2)
 - Individual and teams of teachers use teacher-made, Acuity and other periodic Assessments to assess what students know and don't know. However, there is a loose connection between the school's key standards, some of the assessments used and the instructional practices and curricular decisions they assess. This provides teachers a limited understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses and on their teaching practices, especially, for ELLs and SWDs. As a result, teachers are unable to consistently provide instruction that effectively targets the needs of students, thus accelerating progress for all learners.

- Extend the use of the observation process and analysis of student outcomes to support and improve teaching practices and promote continuous professional growth. (4.1)
 - School administrators visit classrooms and conduct formal and informal observations, connected to a common research-based framework, and provide teachers feedback on instructional practices. However, the frequency of the observations and feedback to teachers, including new teachers, varies among the leaders. In addition, provided to teachers in mostly in the form of a checklist that does not include extensive communication of strengths and areas for growth. This minimizes opportunities for teachers to reflect on instructional practices that promote learning, thus reducing articulation of instructional expectations to improve teaching and student outcomes.

- Ensure the process for reviewing, evaluating and the modification of adult learning practices is based on student data and results in teacher growth. (5.4)
 - School leaders participate and provide input as active members on teacher teams. Also, professional development opportunities are based on teacher requested and student exam results. However, systems that assess the impact of teacher learning experiences, such as teacher teams, professional development offerings, using connecting student data are not yet fully developed. This limits the principal's understands of which capacity-building practices work and which need to be changed. As a result, improvements in teacher learning and student outcomes are hindered.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Ron Brown Academy	UD	D	P	WD
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			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
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?		X		
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?			X	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?			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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?		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>	UD	D	P	WD
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, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			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>	UD	D	P	WD
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, with particular attention to the CCLS?		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		

Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed