

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**P.S. 165 Robert E. Simon
Elementary-Middle School**

**234 WEST 109 STREET
MANHATTAN
NY 10025**

Principal: Brett Gallini

**Dates of review: October 25-26, 2011
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Grossman**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

P.S. 165, the Robert E. Simon School is an elementary – middle school with 830 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 18% Black, 70% Hispanic, 3% Asian students, 1% American Indian and 6% White students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 93.5%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- High quality feedback and supervision enables individual teachers to innovate and has resulted in coherent classrooms in which student needs are ably met. (4.1)
 - Each teacher identifies, jointly with supervisors, research based priority goals that directly align with student achievement goals, serving as the lens for formal observations. Supervisors are in classrooms daily and offer both modeling and customized feedback in a formative fashion. Precise pedagogical priorities are determined and then focused on discretely to ensure that they become embedded. Teachers support one another as peers, with newer teachers directly attributing their improved skills to the quality of mentoring they received from both formal mentors as well as grade level colleagues via their teacher teams. Recognizing a lack of rigor, the principal proactively re-staffed virtually the entire middle school, creating a team with a common vision of serving the adolescent learner, which now makes a students' instructional experience seamless across all grades in the school.
- The school's goals are strongly supported by the effective alignment of resources that directly impact instructional improvement and are reflected in student work. (1.3)
 - Abundant technology and materials ensure that each child always finds a book to read at their level and has access to a tool that can support their learning. English language learners produce written pieces that are on par with their classmates by using tablets to help with translation and vocabulary. Hallway spaces have been created that enable small groups to work collaboratively and encourage conversation, particularly supporting the English language learners. Special education classes previously located in separate corridors are now placed alongside all other classes to ensure equity and reduce isolation of those students and their teachers.
 - Strategic shifts in scheduling and use of time have enriched both student and teacher work at the school. Four common preparation periods per week are used for analysis of student work and the creation of performance based tasks. Teachers meet during two additional periods that have been carved out each month to work on curriculum and plan for common assessments. These two periods are then used to support students' character development through a high quality Town Hall program run by the school's service providers, meeting a need identified in the school survey. An overhaul of cluster teacher time that involves rotating such engaging courses as architecture and music ensures that each child is given a chance to develop skill in these areas.
- High expectations that are clearly communicated and constantly reinforced result in a shared commitment to the ongoing pursuit of excellence. (3.4)
 - The principal's vision of “excellence through structure” has been embraced by the staff. A hands-on approach to setting each classroom up for success has provided models for the teachers which they then adapt to suit individual needs. Daily emails reinforce expectations around such matters as effective room environments, small group instruction, and formative assessment. Clear directives have resulted in all classrooms possessing the same key physical components, such as documentation of unit goals, a data center, daily flow chart, abundant evidence of student work, relevant and usable process charts, leveled

libraries, posted teaching points, and appropriate realia. This clarity has impacted how students utilize classroom resources; they know how to access correctly spelled words, or how to find the math manipulative that may help them solve a problem, thus helping them take ownership of their own learning.

- The teachers, in turn, have worked together in their teams to create parallel structures for students. Every Monday, elementary school teachers send home all assignments for that week, including details of what is to be taught and the goals. In the middle school, a common grading system and uniform structures for instruction promote common priorities across and between grades and subject areas. This consistency brought tremendous clarity to how students understand what is expected of them. Out-of-classroom personnel are matched with high needs students to ensure that students at great risk are given crucial one-on-one support to keep them focused while ensuring there is accountability for their attendance, behavior and performance. Suspensions, behavior incidents, and absenteeism have all been reduced, while completion of homework and participation in class has increased.
- Professional collaboration continually enhances teacher practice, and as a result, tasks and work products reflect greater rigor for all student subgroups. (4.2)
 - Elementary grade teams and middle school content teams examine student work and determine students' current thinking, identifying what they know and are able to do, and figure out how to incorporate this as they plan for the next unit. The kindergarten team for example, developed a rubric for a written narrative to be used for all students in the grade. Utilizing a tuning protocol, the team focused on the work of one gifted and talented student to reflect on the effectiveness of the rubric, identifying where he succeeded and where he fell short. The team offered the presenting teacher many suggestions for how to address the students' shortfalls. After a healthy debate about the relative merits of this rubric for all students, teachers concluded that one rubric, with modifications made to the actual teaching required, would ensure that every student experienced the same level of rigor regardless of need. Many teachers identify explicit ways in which they have changed their practice as a result of the regular feedback they receive from peers and the ongoing sharing of their students' results with one another.
- Targeted professional development enables teachers to address their individual and team goals that are tied directly to student needs. (4.3)
 - Conscious fiscal choices about when best to provide coaching are tied to high leverage areas, such as improving reading comprehension, an area strongly identified as a need. The combination of extensive coaching, visitation, modeling by the principal, and the work of teacher teams all support teachers at the appropriate developmental level. In addition, teacher goals and supervisory observations also influence choices. For example, one group of teachers recently attended behavior management training, while another group has been identified to study centers and choice time more deeply. Middle school teachers have been supported extensively in deepening balanced literacy structures and curricular integration. The teaching staff also takes on independent pursuits aligned to their needs and interests, and these pursuits are strongly supported by the principal.
 - Teacher teams are teacher led, and team leaders are supported deliberately to refine their own skills around protocols and group engagement through professional development. In addition to these team leaders, there is evidence that most teachers assert themselves as leaders in the teams at different points. For example, after the principal laid out his vision for structured curriculum

refinement, the teachers approached the task with tremendous zeal. Groups of teachers stepped in as leaders during this process, giving of their own time, energy, and ideas, to make the vision come alive. Efforts to ensure continuity of priorities and practices are now at the heart of the administration's leadership drive. The ownership of this work that is felt by the teachers results in a richer, more vibrant experience for students, who benefit from the well thought out units and performance based tasks that push their thinking and allow for creativity.

- The school strongly supports its wide array of learners, engendering a strong desire to succeed among students and fosters a belief that anything is attainable in students' futures. (4.4)
 - The pursuit of higher education and a drive to succeed are values and goals held by the school community. In speaking about their teachers, students describe how the colleges their teachers attended greatly influence their own aspirations. Guidance supports place a focus on careful planning for the next phase of education. Middle school students, for example, articulate easily their goals for the high schools they hope to attend and identify key ways, such as support with their portfolios, that the school is helping them prepare for rigorous admission processes. As a result, students successfully identify the best choices for their needs and therefore many of them are accepted at schools of their choice.
 - Recognizing that their traditional advisory curriculum and systems were not meeting the needs of students, the school embarked on a process to re-think the way student support is provided. One aspect of this comprehensive approach includes a social skills and global issues period built in to the end of each school day; and, during this time, some students in need of intense support are pulled out for very small group mentoring, provided by the service providers and support staff. During these small group sessions, students are supported through alternative therapies, such as working with animals or playing group games that develop social skills. As a result, many of the students in this group who were previously demonstrating inappropriate behavior and lack of motivation, have become more conscientious and developed greater self control. One mother said her daughter is a "changed person" who now comes home and does her homework without being asked as a result of the support she has received at school.
- Students experience rigor and think deeply about important, highly relevant content as a result of rich curricula that is aligned well to school goals. (1.1)
 - Teacher teams, using the CCLS as a foundation, adapt and refine their balanced literacy program to sharpen the focus on non-fiction texts in all grades while continuing to develop understanding of literary devices in fiction. As a result of inquiry work in the prior school year, the lower grades have adopted a new, more engaging math curriculum that focuses on problem solving, integrates technology, and has a strong literacy connection. This program works well with an innovative architecture course in which K-2 students demonstrate their understanding of mathematical principles and social studies concepts by creating structures related to the content they are exploring.
 - The creation of a unique and intellectually stimulating course that focuses on global issues has middle school students examining, for example, the role that water, or lack thereof, plays in the geopolitical realm, writing about it, debating it with one another, and sharing their knowledge with younger students who are also studying the issue on their level. A side-by-side dual language program, jointly planned and taught by a team of teachers, immerses students in both

languages, resulting in native Spanish speakers rapidly improving their English skills, while at the same time, native English speakers graduate from the school fluent in Spanish. A wide array of arts, music, and elective courses such as yoga and architecture provide dynamic, engaging opportunities for students to develop talents and interests. Middle school students in particular describe how different their current experience is from their initial time in the school, with one student stating proudly “This school has progressed so much and so have I.”

What the school needs to improve

- Leverage existing strength in teacher practice to refine differentiation and ensure that all classrooms promote independence in all content areas. (1.2)
 - In most classrooms, the school’s beliefs about structure, rigor, and balance are highly evident and consistent, especially with respect to development of literacy and in particular in terms of meeting the needs of English language learners. Students experience a high degree of differentiation and best teaching practice is precisely defined. This is somewhat less evident in math, in which a few classes, particularly in the upper elementary and middle school grades, consisted of the same process, product, and content for all students. As a result, some students finished tasks quickly and became less engaged, while others struggled.
- Continue to strengthen classroom level assessments to incorporate age appropriate reflection via task appropriate rubrics that clearly delineate expectations. (2.2)
 - Teachers use team-designed rubrics and other formative means of gathering information about their students. This information supplements the extensive periodic and performance based assessment systems the school has developed. One teacher created a bookmark, for example, that summarizes the students’ reading conference and serves as a goal setting tool and reminder. Not every teacher, however, is using the extensive information they have about students to maximum advantage. Some rubrics do not convey usable or understandable criteria to students in all grades and contents and as a result, some students are not yet able to identify their next steps or strengths in a precise manner.
- Ensure that systems for reflecting on assessment and grading practices include ample opportunity to increase parent engagement and promote student self-awareness. (5.2)
 - The teachers and staff constantly reflect on the merits of their assessment and curricular choices have embraced the CCLS expectations, which are being gradually embedded in the performance based assessments. Students and parents, however are not always clear about the results of those performance based assessments, and some parents indicate that while there is an open door to the teachers, they are not aware of how their children performed on the tasks. They would like to delve deeper in to what constitutes high quality work so they can assist their children in readying for the demands of the full CCLS integration. Similarly, while the middle school now has a consistent grading policy that has significantly improved student ownership, the policy does not yet fully articulate precise academic goals in every content area and focuses mostly on behaviors such as homework completion or participation.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: P.S. 165 Robert E. Simon	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