

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Ron Brown Academy

Middle School 057

**125 Stuyvesant Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11221**

Principal: Celeste Douglas

Dates of review: February 4-5, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Evelyn Santiago

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Ron Brown Academy is a middle school with 233 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 78% Black, 21% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 26% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 91.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's coherent curricula, including the arts, is carefully aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and engages all students in rigorous learning experiences that result in increasing levels of achievement. (1.1)
 - The school has thoughtfully aligned all areas of the curriculum at all grade levels to state standards and the citywide instructional shifts, including a strong focus on higher order questioning, examining and developing point of view, supporting a position with evidence from the text and writing in all content areas. Curriculum maps reflect standards addressed and assessments that require thinking at high levels and promote college and career readiness. The strength of this alignment is evident in what is taught in the classrooms. For example, in an English language arts class the teacher used questioning to push students' thinking of the author's purpose and development of story message as supported by evidence from the text. In another class students analyzed and discussed metaphors and symbolism from a poem to determine the theme. In math, students used a smart board to illustrate the operations and routinely explained their strategies and thinking when solving problems and equations. Additionally, using funds from an art grant award of \$100,000 the school receives yearly, the school has integrated the arts in the curriculum and extended the school's key standards in the lessons. In one class the students discussed an artists' message through analysis of the details in a drawing and created their own original designs to convey their own artistic interpretations. Furthermore, the Broadway Junior Program that partners with the school provides scripts, musical materials, theatrical resources and the rights to have the students perform Broadway musicals to enhance and apply their learning. As a result, all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, participate in more challenging and creative activities that require thinking, conversation and engagement to enrich learning experiences and accelerate progress. This is evidenced in benchmark assessment outcomes and student work products that show students are making notable progress and significantly improving their writing skills.
- Relationships across the school are warm, supportive and inclusive of students, teachers and families who feel valued in having a voice in the school community. (1.4)
 - The school maintains a strong and highly effective Teacher Advisory Council where teachers serve as advisors to individual and groups of students. The council focuses on building trust between students and staff and maintaining a safe and orderly environment in classrooms and corridors throughout the school. The council encourages students to seek help in addressing issues that may arise by establishing an 'open door policy where students have access to school leaders, teachers and support personnel. Subsequently, the council facilitates interventions and counseling services for targeted students to support their academic, social and emotional growth. The school's "Morning Meeting" ritual with all students and teachers in attendance is one of the strategies used to

reinforce the school's mission, celebrate student attendance and academic achievements and highlight all upcoming school events and activities. The school's 'Creating A Respectful Environment' (CARE) team that includes the guidance counselor, school psychologist, social worker and teachers, supports struggling students with academic and/or social and emotional issues. For example, when a student who was doing well in school academically demonstrated difficulty adjusting to school protocols, CARE Team members took immediate steps to provide interventions and support the student and her family. The CARE Team continues to closely monitor the student's behavior and provides the services needed to maintain the student's positive social and emotional growth. As a result, the student is adjusting well and is now a member of the student government. Additionally, selected students represent their classmates at the School Leadership Team and Student Government meetings where they voice concerns and provide ideas for school improvement. One of the students' items for negotiation at the meetings was the request to have the school sponsor more trips for the students. Consequently, the school is planning more trips that extend the curriculum and include visits to college campuses. These efforts have led to a significant reduction in the number of incidents and suspensions, continued increase in student attendance to 92% so far this year and students and parents alike expressing "the school is like family; everyone looks out for each other."

- Students demonstrate high levels of engagement in well-designed lessons that consistently motivate them to increase their performance. (1.2)
 - The school uses the Danielson framework across classrooms that reflect the school's belief on what effective instruction looks like. Teachers engage all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, in high level task assignments aligned to the CCLS and provide a range of entry points that meet the various needs of the students. For example, in an English language arts class all the students worked on analyzing how an author communicates point of view using text evidence. The SETSS teacher, who pushes into the classroom, works with a group of students based on reading levels; the classroom teacher worked with another group and a third group of students completed customized assignments based on their individual needs at the computers. In a science class students worked in groups and conducted experiments to determine the effects of high/low salinity in water. The teacher accommodated students with disabilities by sitting with the students to strengthen their understanding and using a larger font in the text they were reading. Additionally, push-in English language support ensured that all students were able to participate in the same challenging assignments through effective demonstration and translation. This has yielded higher student success as measured by formative assessments and well designed exit slips that provide teachers specific feedback on individual levels of student learning.
- Teacher collaborations ensure a direct focus on examining student work to plan together to improve teacher practice and student outcomes. (4.2)

- All teachers participate in inquiry based teacher teams that meet weekly and are organized by content area. The teams focus on planning lessons that align to the CCLS, improving instructional practices and analyzing task assignments and student work to fully accommodate all students, especially students with disabilities and English language learners. At the meetings teachers analyze and discuss individual student work and share instructional strategies to deepen student thinking and learning. For example, teachers in the math team analyzed math problems and tasks to determine where students may encounter difficulties completing the assignments in order to plan and provide appropriate scaffolds and accommodations to meet the needs of the learner. This led to tier 1 interventions that included providing translation in Arabic for an English language learner and using larger font and color coding for students who use glasses but do not always wear them at school. This level of teacher planning and collaboration has improved instructional capacity and accelerated progress made by students, especially student subgroups, as evidenced by improvement in their work products and interim assessments results.
- The school principal strongly supports providing opportunities to develop and promote teacher leadership. The school's partnership with the Leadership Academy has resulted in the school mentoring several aspiring principal and assistant principal candidates. Also, teachers have been assigned as grade leaders and team leaders on a rotating basis so that all teachers experience working in a leadership role with their colleagues. Selected teacher leads are members of the school cabinet and meet with the school leadership weekly. They attend workshops and receive ongoing training from network specialists and an Aussie consultant who visits the school every two weeks. The teacher leads share the information with staff and conduct turn-key training at grade, team and staff meetings. Additionally, teacher teams are given autonomy in the development of units of study and are encouraged to develop and use instructional strategies that result in student learning. These structures promote and enhance teachers' decision-making capacity to plan instruction and improve classroom practices to increase student progress and achievement.

What the school needs to improve

- Further align and systematize current grading practices to ensure that all students have a firm understanding of their performance and can use this information to increase ownership of their learning. (2.2)
 - Teachers gather a variety of data that includes rubrics, content area unit tests, formative assessments and interim assessments based on benchmark CCLS and key standards. Teachers also use student exit slips to receive feedback from students and adjust their instruction accordingly. The information is gathered and analyzed by classroom teachers and teacher teams to determine levels of student learning and inform planning. Students receive feedback during individual conferences with teachers to establish goals based on assessment results for next steps. Additionally, students have access to their grade reports through the En-grade computer based system that shows their performance outcomes in English language arts, math and content areas to inform

progress and focus attention to identified areas of need. Parents also have access to the En-grade system so they can support their children's efforts at home. However, the analysis of student data does not fully include information for English language learners and Individual Education Plans (IEP) for students with disabilities when planning lessons thus, teachers have not yet maximized their professional knowledge to adjust the learning for all students.

- Extend data systems to further align to the school's goals so that all constituents are aware of progress toward meeting the goals and execution of action plans thus, ensuring that goals have been achieved (3.1)
 - School goals have been developed by the School Leadership Team (SLT) based on summative assessments, the school Progress Report and the latest Quality Review that are reflected in the school's Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP). Progress towards these goals is monitored via analysis of formative assessments, student writing and portfolios to make adjustments to ensure student learning and social and emotional development. For example, in efforts to raise levels of performance in science, the school re-assigned a science teacher with a track record of student success to teach seventh and eighth grade students. As a result, the most recent assessment data indicates significant increases in science for students in these grades. Moreover in response to data gathered from the school's environment survey, the school retained a Dean of students who works directly with students and facilitates workshops for staff and parents to promote students' positive behavior in school. In addition, staff and parent members of the SLT have input in the analysis of progress and adjustment of goals and all parents are kept informed of their children's progress in all subject areas via monthly progress reports. However, structures to keep all parents informed of progress being made with school-wide goals are not yet fully in effect. This lessens opportunities for parents to have input and provide feedback to make needed adjustments and leverage changes for continued improvement and growth.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Ron Brown Academy	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			X				
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?			X				
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?			X				
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?			X				
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X				
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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				
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed