



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Riverdale Avenue Middle School

Middle School K668

**76 Riverdale Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11212**

Principal: Kiersten Ward

**Date of review: January 30, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor**

The School Context

Riverdale Avenue Middle School is a middle school with 94 students from grade 6 through grade 7. The school population comprises 86% Black, 12% Hispanic, 0% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 94.0%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards	Additional Findings	Proficient
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	Focus	Proficient
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	Celebration	Well Developed
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Additional Findings	Well Developed
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Continuous cycles of assessments, closely matched to curricula, result in feedback to staff and students about learners' progress towards goals, informing strategic and timely instructional adjustments to curricula and instruction.

Impact

Data from assessments create an accurate snapshot of students' progress towards mastery of learning goals so that students' needs are targeted accurately and addressed via curricula and instructional adjustments that improve their achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses a variety of assessments in evaluating student progress towards mastery of learning targets. For example, for each unit of study teachers administer pre and post unit assessments. In addition, benchmark assessments across content areas, Running Records, Teachers' College Reading and Writing Performance Tasks, SchoolNet periodic assessments and NY Ready assessments are administered across grades, with results used to track student progress toward mastering the standards assessed. Further, a consultant from Cambridge Education works with the principal in generating data reports that all staff members examine weekly, creating individual profiles that identify growth percentile, areas of mastery and areas that require additional intervention for each child.
- Using mastery trackers and item skills analysis, the principal and staff analyze trends in student performance data. Teachers use their findings to determine groupings of students for small group instruction as well as for afterschool and Saturday intervention activities. Teachers also use this information to revise units, resulting in re-teaching for improved mastery of standards. For example, the principal noted that based on a review of student progress in meeting standards tested in baseline assessments, teachers modified math units, providing additional practice with problems related to "proportional relationships". Results on a subsequent assessment showed improved student mastery of this skill.
- A variety of tools are used to chart and disseminate feedback about student performance to all staff and students. For example, students reported that all teachers conference with them weekly, including during advisory sessions, using rubrics and mastery tracking sheets to show them where they have made progress and where they need to work harder. One student added that teachers use the rubric to show them what they have to do "to get a good score" before they start doing a task. When the task is completed they "get feedback again", with the rubric showing them what they did well and what to improve. Another student noted that teachers give them feedback "all the time" as they participate in student led conferences where they tell their parents about their performance.
- Student folders viewed showed samples of mastery sheets with scores on each skill area, for a given standard that is assessed. The folders also showed samples of student work with feedback, including next steps from the teacher and copies of mastery trackers, task specific rubrics, conference notes, performance task assessments administered to date, and logs of goals set by students and their teachers.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies and academic tasks immerse all students in rigorous work and discussions that foster higher-order thinking and learning. However, instructional strategies do not illustrate optimal use of extensions to evoke student ownership of learning.

Impact

While academic tasks promote student progress towards being college and career ready, there are missed opportunities to further deepen student learning via completion of tasks that allow all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, to demonstrate high levels of ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Within each subject area and across grade levels, lessons offered multiple opportunities for students in flexible groupings to learn and practice new concepts and skills, with peers and individually, through focus questions provided by teachers. For example, groups of students in a math class collaborated with peers to determine solutions to problems involving fractions. Similarly, in another class, pairs of students worked together to “create a multiple representation flap book” in response to the question, “How can we represent a linear relationship?” In both cases, students used academic vocabulary and used a document camera to illustrate and explain the steps used in problem solving.
- In most classrooms visited tasks and lessons facilitated student participation, sustained student-to-student dialogue and student generated questions of high cognitive challenge. For example, in a humanities class the teacher used effective questioning to drive high level peer to peer questioning as students worked with partners, using accountable talk stems and citing evidence from texts in facilitating a student led discussion of, “The similarities and differences between the Ancient and Modern Wonders of the World”. In another class, the teacher served as a facilitator, with a student teaching a lesson showing peers “how to use possessive and plural nouns correctly in sentences”. This high level of engagement of students in peer to peer dialogue was not evident in a few other classrooms visited.
- In all classrooms visited there was evidence of differentiated tasks or differentiated approaches to tasks for individual or groups of learners. For example, in a class with students with disabilities across two grades, students worked at stations on tasks that were differentiated. Similarly in a math class, students in groups worked on different problem sets. However tasks that maximize student ownership of learning were not evident across classrooms. Most tasks involved students responding to teacher generated learning activities that did not offer more advanced students opportunities to tackle higher level self-selected tasks, as extensions to curricula. Further, while student work products viewed during the student meeting showed engagement in inquiry projects, there was little evidence of engagement of students in independent research on student-selected topics across content areas.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Using student work and data, the school has developed and implemented curricula aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts.

Impact

Across disciplines, curricula reflects targeted focus on ensuring that all students have access to engaging and demanding tasks that support college and career readiness goals and expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal utilizes weekly professional development sessions to engage teachers in working with network staff, a data specialist from Cambridge Education, teacher leaders and a consultant from Generation Ready, in ongoing alignment of curricula and tasks to Common Core Standards and instructional shifts. Teachers reported that there is a unit plan template that is used by everyone to craft units of study aligned to the Common Core Standards and they follow a backwards design approach in creating standards based performance tasks for all students.
- The school's curricula consists of teacher created units based on modifications of Common Core aligned units of instruction from resources applicable to all core content areas. For example unit maps show adaptations in math from *Connected Math Project (CMP)*, *Glencoe Science* and Teachers' College "Facing History" curricula, allowing for ongoing alignment of curricula to Common Core and other content standards. Tasks offer students opportunities to engage in learning activities such as conducting scientific investigations, composing explanations of inferences drawn from texts, solving problems in math, and preparing summaries of reading selections from a range of nonfiction texts.
- The school's curricula incorporates specific instructional materials for English language learners and students with disabilities. These include manipulatives, technology assisted learning presentations, and intervention activities via *NY Ready*, *Triumph Learning* and *IXL*, which provide students with additional opportunities to practice skills independently and repeatedly to improve mastery. Teachers of English language Learners and students with disabilities meet with other teachers to look at units of study and help determine modifications to the units based on students' needs. Unit and lesson plans show a "Process vs. Product" section which specifies assessments and forms of differentiated supports, further supporting students' access to tasks grounded in relevant content area standards.
- Curricula also includes coverage of topics and skills linked to Enrichment Clusters, based on the Renzulli School wide Enrichment Model, which offer students a choice of co-curricular activities such as culinary arts, dance, animation and filmmaking, that they are able to participate in for two periods on Friday afternoons. The clusters are created by teachers and selected by students over three cycles three per year, based on interest surveys. There are also units of study linked to an advisory program designed to meet students' emotional and social needs by engaging them in activities such as games, competitions, student-led meetings and independent reading every morning.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The principal and staff have created a culture for learning that systematically conveys high expectations to all members of the school community and immerses them in activities that support meeting the expectations.

Impact

Through partnerships with stakeholders in and outside of the school, the principal continually raises the bar for high quality work by all staff and students, leading to collective responsibility for learning and ongoing improvement in staff and student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Instructional memoranda, a staff events calendar, an assessment calendar and templates for lesson study, analyzing student work and unit and lesson planning are distributed to all staff, illustrating the school's high expectations for teaching and learning. In addition, the principal uses conferences, reviews of unit and lesson plans, feedback from observations, and analyses of student data to hold all staff accountable for the school's high expectations. For example, instructional memoranda state expectations linked to the targeted components of the Danielson Framework, content specific strategies, school culture, and the schoolwide instructional focus (high student interaction and engagement). In collaboration with a Culture Consultant, Cambridge Education data specialist, Generation Ready consultant, network liaisons and staff from Partnership with Children, the principal trains all staff to meet the expectations via weekly school based meetings, conferences and workshops as well as offsite professional development offerings from a "Staff Professional Learning Calendar".
- High expectations are communicated to students via a "RAMS Code of Excellence" that highlights the expectations (Resilience, Altruism, Mastery and Self-discipline) and suggests how students can attain each. Students who exhibit these traits are celebrated at a monthly awards assembly and featured in the student newsletter, *Ramified News*, along with other students of the month and students with perfect attendance. All students are also trained to take responsibility for their learning by presenting student-led conferences where they discuss their work with parents three times per year, in lieu of parent teacher conferences. Further, as observed during a class visit, a student teaches a lesson in humanities on Fridays based on a skill deficit identified during the week. The principal stated that students visit local colleges, including Fordham University, Medgar Evers College and St. Johns University, to explore expectations for college.
- Progress reports are distributed to students and families six times during the school year, making them aware of their children's progress in mastering expectations for the next grade. Parents reported that a "Parent University" trains families in helping their children to succeed in meeting school expectations by offering courses that families take each month, with credits towards a graduation ceremony to be held in June. In addition at weekly conferences on Tuesdays, Curriculum Nights, and Parent-Principal Breakfast, parents receive information about expectations for their children. Parents also stated that they have attended workshops with their children, exploring topics such as "Common Core Standards, Strategies to Help Your Child" and "College and Career Awareness Skills". Several parents stated that they are constantly kept informed of students' progress and school events via school messenger, emails and telephone calls from the Parent Coordinator and other staff.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Structured weekly team meetings allow all staff to regularly engage in collaborative planning, data analysis and decision making linked to school goals and leaning initiatives.

Impact

Teachers regularly share strategies that improve their practice and collaborate with the principal and others in developing support systems that result in student progress towards goals and expectations linked to Common Core Standards, instructional shifts and other relevant standards.

Supporting Evidence

- Two teacher teams meet every Tuesday in cycles of inquiry activities that span 4 weeks, during which members of the teams engage in activities such as using a protocol to examine student work and data, developing or revising curricula and designing curricular and instructional adjustments to improve student mastery of Common Core and instructional shifts aligned learning targets. They focus attention on patterns and trends across classrooms and collaboratively assess the effectiveness of instructional strategies implemented in each other’s classroom. For example, observation of a teacher team meeting showed a “Protocol for Analyzing Student Work” and an “Inquiry Cycle” diagram guiding teachers in analyzing student work, identifying students’ strengths and needs, and eliciting recommendations from peers for follow up instructional adjustments to improve students’ performance. Conversations with mentors, teacher leaders, the dean and other staff inform inquiry activities, as teams address concerns and collaborate in devising ways to improve all students’ mastery of standards by eliminating barriers to student learning.
- Weekly Data Team meetings are used to analyze current benchmarks and student performance in relation to standards that students are expected to master. For example, the Data Team has looked at Running Records data and SchoolNet benchmark data, identifying skill areas that show improvement by students and areas that need to be revisited via adjustments to curricula and/or instruction. Using a spreadsheet, the principal demonstrated how the school identifies trends at the classroom level and across grade levels. Mastery trackers with both classroom and individual student level data are also analyzed at team meetings, illuminating standards and skills that need to be retaught, based on the numbers of students in each class showing low levels of mastery.
- Teacher teams include a CARE (Children Are Reason Enough) team which meets weekly to discuss and plan interventions for students who have been referred to them by classroom teachers or other staff. Team members include a guidance counselor, social workers, a psychologist, the principal, a special-education liaison and a representative of Partnership with Children, the Community Based Organization that facilitates the activities of this team. According to a member of this team they share observations about the students, examine their work and conduct as part of “root-cause analysis of why the student may be acting-out and/or unable to keep up in the classroom”. There is also an Advisory Coordinating Team (consisting of an Advisory education consultant, a Partnership with Children representative and a teacher leader) that meets twice per month to create and refine advisory curriculum for all students.