



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Rachel Carson High School

High School 344

**501 West Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11224**

Principal: Edward Wilensky

Dates of Review: May 5 - 6, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Linda Waite

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Rachel Carson School is a high school with 306 students from grade 9 through grade 11. The school population comprises 28% Black, 29% Hispanic, 32% White and 11% Asian. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 7% special education students. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007-2008 was 84.3%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 100% eligibility.

The school opened in September 2005 and will include 12th grade next year. Its main focus is to combine Marine Environment into all areas of the curriculum. The partnership with the New York Aquarium and the shorelines of Coney Island offer the school a living laboratory and gives students real world experiences. The school shares its building with a middle school and occupies the second and third floors.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and the school community have a clear vision for the school that will effect change.
- Parents and students respect and trust the principal, faculty and staff, and support the high expectations set by the school.
- The school utilizes the budget effectively to provide academic and personal support services to meet the needs of all students.
- The school analyzes data well to improve the academic performance of students in greatest need.
- The school uses data well to make professional development decisions that help meet the improvement goals of teachers and students.
- The school has formed effective partnerships with outside organizations to support the academic and social growth of students.
- The school develops and shares its goals clearly with the entire school community to improve student performance.
- The school utilizes data to support individual students, grade level and groups whose progress has been identified as a focus group.
- The school provides a good broad curriculum both within and outside the school day to improve student progress.
- The verbal communication that exists between the school and parents allows for useful information that supports student learning to be shared.

What the school needs to improve

- Analyze data by ethnic, sub-groups and cohort in a more systematic and thorough way.
- Develop a longitudinal tracking system to measure progress from grade of entry to grade of exit.
- Use measurable interim goals, with suitable timeframes, for measuring success and making adjustments for improving student outcomes.
- Develop a written communication policy that outlines goals set for each student and information on how parents can support learning.
- Continue to develop a school-wide focus on the differentiation of instruction to improve teaching and learning outcomes for students.
- Utilize interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made some progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

After a troubled history, the school has become stable and provides a safe, nurturing environment that promotes teaching and learning. The principal has a clear vision for the school, and communicates this effectively to all members of the school community. The school uses and analyzes data well to establish school-wide goals as part of the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan. The principal's strategic use of budget provides a broad curriculum and additional academic and personal support services to meet the needs of students. The school's use of data to align goals to professional development supports teachers, including those new to the profession, and enables them to develop the confidence to increase student success. Parents and students respect and trust the principal, faculty and staff and support the high expectations set by the school. Students say, "The small school setting supports the relationships we have with our teachers, and the goals set for us help our academic growth." Parents believe that the principal's marine and environmental science background is valuable to the education their children receive. They view the principal as honest, caring, concerned, and responsible in no small part for the school's turnaround. Since the last review, the school has made some progress in using assessments, setting interim goals and communicating goals to students.

The school has made gains in many areas but continues to be in the early stages of using data to track the test performance of different student subgroups. The school acknowledges that gathering and using data for planning goals, strategies and benchmarks should remain a focus for next year. The amount of data available is great and the school uses it well to analyze the needs of students most in need. However, it does not use it to measure progress from grade to grade or use it consistently to inform and differentiate instruction. The school's inquiry team has utilized a range of diagnostic and other data to identify students who are in need of improvement in academic subject areas. It is using data effectively to help students most in need to improve reading and writing skills.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 - Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school conducts an item analysis of a variety of tests to create an accurate database for each student, facilitating an understanding of their performance. It also monitors student progress through periodic assessment. The administration, faculty and guidance counselor meet regularly to discuss student achievement to determine support services to

help improve performance. Several teachers utilize an electronic grading system that they share with students and parents to track progress. The school gathers data on special education students by looking at the individual education plans to create a baseline of what students can and cannot do. It uses this information to develop appropriate strategies that have a positive impact on learning outcomes. The school uses data to understand the progress of English language learners and to identify their needs, providing them with tutoring, test preparation and Saturday academy to improve their skills. The school also uses data to select students for College Now courses to challenge them further. Teachers have participated in professional development on how to gather and use data to identify areas of concern and plan for effective instruction. The school does not yet monitor the performance and progress of students sufficiently by gender or ethnicity, so it is not in a strong position to identify areas to develop. Similarly, it does not track student progress from grade to grade to monitor on-going performance longitudinally.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The principal and faculty have worked hard to establish a school culture of mutual respect and high expectations. Teachers are committed to help students meet Regents and graduation requirements. They meet to discuss data, needed skills and instructional practices to assist students in achieving goals. The principal understands the importance of setting goals and monitoring student progress and shares them well with all members of the school community, using faculty conferences and parent teacher association meetings. Parents and teachers receive written copies of these.

The school makes plans for students based on objective data rather than relying on teachers’ impressions, as used to happen. The principal uses programming effectively to provide students time within the school day to meet with teachers. During these sessions, the teacher and the student review classwork, attendance and Regents’ data to set goals. Where relevant, they also consider important information provided by the English as a second language teacher, special education teacher or the guidance counselor. The school uses class tests and mock Regents to assess learning, measure progress and identify academic interventions to support learning. The school caters well for students most in need of improvement, supported by the work of its inquiry team. Action research guides teachers in using strategies, such as graphic organizers and “read-alouds”, to improve comprehension. Every six weeks, staff use interim assessments to monitor the progress of sixteen students.

The school has good systems to communicate with parents verbally, who take advantage of the school’s “open door” policy to drop in, call, or e-mail, to discuss their child’s progress. Teachers also outreach to parents to keep them informed and seek their assistance in working with the school. In addition, the school shares information about performance and progress with parents through six report cards and four progress reports during the year. However, reports do not include interim student goals and lack sufficient detail for parents to be able to assist their children in reaching their goals.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

Even though the building offers limited space and facilities, the principal believes, “The smallness of the school should never limit students’ academic and social growth.” The principal and assistant principal use the school’s budget well to expand course offerings and provide students with the opportunity to participate in after-school programs that were not available previously. This results in a broad curriculum. The school offers its students the choice of two foreign languages, French and Spanish. In keeping with the school’s coastal studies theme, the students gain wide exposure to the sciences, including marine science, environmental science, chemistry and physics. The school integrates its theme effectively in all subjects through project-based assignments. The halls display good quality student work on marine and coastal geography. Each classroom houses several well-designed fish tanks that the Marine Squad maintains. The school is pro-active in designing the 12th grade program and curriculum maps for next year’s senior class.

The school places an emphasis on student engagement and meeting their individual needs. The purchase of smart boards and class sets of laptops motivate students in the learning process. Teachers use data to develop student groupings within the class and use the results from student surveys to address learning styles. Realizing budgetary limitations, the school addresses the need of advanced students through College Now and research projects. The school has not yet fully aligned data to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students. Lessons conducted by a majority of the teachers utilize a whole group approach and do not focus on the individual needs of the students. Classes using a team-teaching approach do not always take advantage of the second teacher to address the individual learning needs of students or group needs.

A great atmosphere of mutual respect created by members of the school community supports teaching and learning. Teachers offer their time freely, tutoring during lunch periods to help students understand key concepts and skills better. The school provides additional learning support before and after school and through Saturday Academy.

The principal rewards achievement, attendance, and community service through having “Lunch with the Principal”. It is during this time that he hears students’ assessments of what the school is doing well, and areas it could improve. It is from the outgrowth of conversations with students that many extra-curricular activities have become a reality. The school now supports several clubs including science aquarium squad, dance, step, drama, film and video and basketball. Students firmly believe “that Rachel Carson is the best place to be”.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school uses the strengths and interests of staff to build capacity. Although the school has made gains in using professional development to improve teaching and learning, its structures are currently too informal to ensure consistency of good practice. The school uses test data, teacher observations and walkthroughs to develop professional learning conferences to meet the needs of teachers and students. The school has set up “in-

house” visitations between teachers to identify strategies which improve teaching levels. The principal uses the observation process to highlight good instructional practices that engage students in learning and meet their needs. The school sets up teacher visits to partner schools in their support organization. The school is beginning to use common planning time, faculty conferences and retreats to improve instruction and learning.

The majority of the teaching staff is young and new to the teaching profession. The principal supports their professional growth by offering training and support for them to succeed and promote the learning needs of their students. New teachers benefit from help in setting up class rules, attendance and grading procedures, and classroom management techniques that are essential to student learning. Further support is given by pairing more experienced teachers with those less experienced to refine teaching skills.

The school’s main goal is to improve student engagement and differentiated instruction. The school uses its partnerships with outside consultants to conduct workshops, demonstrate model lessons that link data to instruction, and provide in-class support to improve teaching skills. The Learning Support Organization assists teachers of math, English language arts and special education to address content needs.

Partnerships with the New York Aquarium and Kingsborough Community College enhance and support the science program well. These partnerships offer opportunities for students to use state of the art science labs, attend exhibits, and conduct research. Additionally, Kingsborough Community College works with the school to give students the chance to become familiar with college level work and earn college credit.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The Comprehensive Education Plan provides the framework for the school’s work and includes data-led goals, which it reviews at the end of each school term. However, the school does not set interim goals with suitable timeframes, making progress towards goal achievement more difficult to monitor. The principal uses the first conference of the school year to discuss data and show teachers how goals and instructional practices are aligned. Throughout the school year, the principal uses faculty conferences and planning conferences to share additional data from report cards and Regents to revise goals for teachers and students. This can result in adjustments to instructional practice. Members of the school leadership team and the faculty have a voice in revising goals. This year, the school administered Acuity to a targeted group of students to determine skills, inform instruction and measure progress on a regular basis. The principal realizes the need to focus on making this a school-wide practice to drive the next stages of goal setting and improvement planning.

Teachers from each department use mock Regents to measure student progress and determine instructional practices and intervention services. Teachers reflect on instructional practices and re-adjust strategies to meet the needs of their students better. Data shows that these practices are successful in increasing the number of students earning credits and making progress proficiency levels.

Under the present principal’s leadership, a cultural shift has occurred. The school is now in a position to move forward and set goals and priorities that focus on building structures and practices that support teacher and student learning.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Rachel Carson High School	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score			X		

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?			X		
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?			X		
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?			X		
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?		X			
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?			X		
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X		

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?			X		
2.2 focus on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area?				X	
2.3 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?				X	
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?			X		
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?			X		
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X		

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?			X		
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?			X		
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X		

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?			X		
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?			X		
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?			X		
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?			X		
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?			X		
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?			X		
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X		

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?		X			
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X		

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped