

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

The Ralph Bunche School

Elementary School 125

**425 West 123rd Street
New York
NY 10027**

Principal: Rafaela Espinal

Dates of review: April 13 - 14, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Michael L. Schurek

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Ralph Bunche School is an elementary school with 238 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 63.9% Black, 29.4% Hispanic, 0.8% White, 4.6% Asian and 2% other students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 95.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The entire school community begins each day with morning meetings that celebrate the good citizenship of its members. Additionally, core values and personal achievements are recognized, resulting in a very safe, nurturing, and respectful environment. Students appreciate the challenging and varied learning activities in the school such as hands-on science and math, reading and writing workshop, music, art, technology, swimming, team sports, and educational trips, all designed to accelerate their learning. Numerous partnerships provide extensive social-emotional support to students and families and foster the individualized attention that helps students to excel.

The school's robust use of periodic and classroom assessment data enables them to consistently develop skill specific long- and short-term learning goals in English language arts and math in all grades, including those for key student subgroups, which are tracked and communicated regularly to students and their families. Benchmark assessments are used in the upper grades to establish content area goals and group students according to needs; however, this practice has not yet been extended down to the lower grades.

The principal, in her first year, has strategically matched staff to assignments that enable students' needs to be met and holds teachers accountable through consistent and regular assessments that monitor and track student progress. All teachers are organized into teams that meet regularly to examine student data and work, share best practices, and adjust instruction to improve learning outcomes. Additional staff members provide in and out of classroom support before, after, and during school, thus enabling student subgroups to perform well as evidenced by their extraordinary proficiency gains.

Parents praise the school's relaxed atmosphere, dual language classes, and the reading challenge that requires students to read at least one hour per day. A parent, new to the school, with two students attending stated, "In this school, my children tell me to shut off the television so they can read and do their work. This never happened before." Parents appreciate the accessibility and openness of the principal, but feel that more needs to be done to involve them in school decision-making.

The principal has organized a highly effective team of administrators and teacher leaders that constantly evaluate the work of the teacher teams and curriculum offerings. This practice has enabled the school to make organizational mid-year changes, such as the formation of a new dual language class, to better meet student needs. However, not all of the school's action plans include specific interim benchmarks to monitor progress and make adjustments along the way.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Leaders make informed and effective decisions across all aspects of the school, which support improvements in learning.
 - The principal uses school resources to lower class size, retain extra staff for push-in/pull-out services and before/after-school tutorials, and purchase the services of literacy and math consultants to train staff in using the workshop model to engage students. These practices result in increasing student achievement as evidenced by steady gains in reading and math skill levels throughout the year.
 - Teachers' schedules enable them to meet in teams each week to share best practices and develop strategies, such as using graphic organizers to expand students' critical thinking skills, to better meet student needs. Teachers hold themselves accountable for their students through student data and administrative feedback, resulting in increased outcomes.
- The principal and staff work as a unified team to create a calm, respectful, and orderly environment for learning to take place.
 - The principal emphasizes core values on a daily basis to develop high levels of respect and responsibility for all community stakeholders. School wide gatherings take place each morning where the principal models respect and recognizes members of the community publicly for positive citizenship. A drive to expand community involvement was conducted because of low parent response for the Learning Environment Survey, resulting in 75% parental participation for this year's survey, an increase of 32%.
 - The school raises the adult-to-student ratio every day by utilizing outside organizations and local colleges to bring extra adults to the school who assist teachers and provide individual and small group attention to ensure students' social-emotional and academic needs are addressed.
- Staff meticulously gathers a wide range of relevant data across all subjects to understand individual and subgroup performance, progress and learning needs.
 - Teachers, individually and in teams, examine a wide range of classroom data such as running records, math and literacy benchmark achievement, and conferring notes, to identify student strengths and weaknesses. This information is used well to differentiate instruction and adjust curricula to better meet student needs.
 - Administrators and teachers use ARIS and Acuity results to analyze interim assessment data and identify individual and subgroup areas of need. Teachers are thus able to design suitable programs, including before and after-school, individualized, and small group activities that accelerate learning. Teachers also utilize daily assessment activities, such as exit slips in all subjects, to monitor teaching efficacy and adjust teaching practices.

- Individual and groups of students benefit from well-matched targeted, caring support that fosters their success.
 - Classroom teachers and support staff work with English language learners, special education students, and lower performing students in smaller settings both in and out of the classrooms, utilizing differentiated instruction techniques that enable students to meet their long- and short- term goals. This ongoing practice enabled the school to earn 12 out of 15 possible extra credits on their recent Progress Report for exemplary proficiency gains in English language arts and math for all measureable student subgroups.
 - Teachers meet regularly in teams to examine data allowing them to group students according to need and establish targeted goals and action plans. Interim checkpoints every four to six weeks provides teachers opportunities to monitor student performance, while holding themselves accountable for their students learning, resulting in increased outcomes.
- The school's guidance practices and partnerships support students and their families in continual learning and promote students' personal growth and development.
 - The school enjoys numerous partnerships with outside agencies that support students' social-emotional well being. Anti-bullying rallies, and training for staff and students by a child abuse puppeteer in prevention and reporting, contributes to a safe and respectful environment. Daily school-wide morning meetings and Friday assemblies publically recognize students' successes and achievements leading to the building of self-esteem.
 - In addition to training staff regarding child abuse procedures, the school's guidance department offers the help of social workers, from within and outside the school, to provide child/youth development services as needed to students and their families.
- Teachers collaborate to examine student work, plan together, and share ideas and best practice, through a desire to improve student outcomes.
 - All teachers meet each week, sometimes for double periods, to conduct collaborative inquiry work on grade-level teams, resulting in an increase of purposeful and explicit teaching as evidenced by rigorous student work products and data results.
 - Teacher team leaders are part of the principal's cabinet and represent all subject and pedagogical constituencies. They meet with administration weekly in a highly engaging fashion to share information, discuss suitable adjustments to classroom practice, and provide relevant resources and support. This arrangement builds capacity and develops leadership skills in motivated teachers, as well as improving standards.
- The principal has established very effective systems for school-self-evaluation to make instructional and organizational modifications that improve student performance.
 - The principal interviews teachers, studies class data, and conducts observations to strategically match teacher assignments to school and student needs. This ongoing practice enabled organizational refinement as evidenced by mid-year adjustments to co-teacher team members.

- An increase in upper-grade English language learners caused the school to evaluate current curriculum practices in light of student needs. As a result, a grade 5 class was closed and converted to a grade 4/5 Spanish dual language class, resulting in improved student outcomes.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the practice of disaggregating all content area data to every grade level to enhance instruction and student outcomes.
 - Benchmark assessments in science and social studies are used in the upper grades to analyze content area skills and form groups based upon identified deficiency areas. While these assessments identify trends in the upper grades, and are accessible for making instructional decisions, they are not administered in the lower grades indicating an inconsistency of practice and an uneven use of grade-level data to analyze student performance.
- Extend and refine action planning to include interim benchmarks for all school goals in order to monitor and expedite revisions to maximize teaching and learning.
 - Teacher teams establish specific measureable benchmarks for their action plans in literacy and math, but not in other content areas. School action plans generally use percentage-based target gains in most areas as the overall annual goal, and examine interim data during the year without setting a specific benchmark to measure on-going success. This inconsistency in practice weakens long-term planning and limits the transparency needed to develop staff ownership and monitor progress towards reaching the goals.
- Provide additional supports to increase family participation and parental decision-making to strengthen community involvement.
 - The principal strategically reaches out to parents through written communications and orally during assemblies, meetings, and school activities. However, due to her recent arrival, the consistency needed to establish deep parental decision-making has not yet been developed.
 - The school welcomes community involvement and provides fun activities like carnivals and pool parties to encourage participation. However, childcare and leadership workshops are not yet an embedded practice thus limiting higher levels of familial involvement.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Ralph Bunche School	△	▷	✓	+
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>	△	▷	✓	+
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?				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
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				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>	△	▷	✓	+
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 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?				X
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?			X	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				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>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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 students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				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>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				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>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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?				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
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X	

Quality Review Scoring Key

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