Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Riverdale Avenue Community School

Elementary School K446

76 Riverdale Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11212

Principal: Meghan Dunn

Date of review: February 27, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor

The School Context

Riverdale Avenue Community School is an elementary school with 294 students from grade pre K through grade 4. The school population comprises 78% Black, 16% Hispanic, 1% White, 3% Multi-Racial and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 89%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Developing**
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**	**Developing**
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	**Additional Findings**	**Developing**
School Culture		
To what extent does the school…	**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	**Celebration**	**Proficient**
Systems for Improvement		
To what extent does the school…	**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:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

The principal communicates to staff and families, high expectations for improved teaching and learning and provides supports that contribute to success in meeting the expectations.

Impact

The school's high expectations for learning are shared with all staff and families, who in turn work collaboratively with each other to ensure that the expectations are met.

Supporting Evidence

- Tools such as a staff handbook, newsletters, memos, observation reports and a "Statement of Teaching" communicate expectations for teaching and learning across the school. Staff members articulated common practices that are expected across classrooms and added that high expectations are constantly reinforced by the principal in one to one meetings with staff as well as during staff conferences.

- With high expectations for ongoing improvement in teacher pedagogy embedded as one of the school's goals, teachers stated that the Instructional Team led them in setting a professional goal that reflected one of three targeted domains (Designing Coherent Instruction, Engaging Students in Learning, and Assessments) of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The school supports the attainment of this goal via school wide professional development and cycles of inquiry activities involving all teachers in a direct evaluation of their proficiency in relation to the pedagogical skills embedded in the self-selected domain of the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

- There is a school wide system for "conferring" that holds teachers accountable for sharing with each other and service providers, information about students' needs and progress in reading. Teachers of the same students are expected to use a common "conferring notebook" kept by each student, to share and maintain a record of findings from individual level conferencing with the student. The principal noted that the school facilitated professional development around conferring strategies and methods in order to support staff in meeting this expectation.

- Parents reported that the school uses progress reports, report cards, newsletters, one to one conferences, workshops and other special events to inform them of high expectations for their children and ways to help them succeed. For example, several families referenced a breakfast meeting for each grade, reading workshops, parent-child field trips and special information sessions for parents of early childhood students, noting that those events provided families with information about what their children are learning.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing

Findings

All lessons viewed showed some focus on strategies for differentiation of learning. However instruction did not consistently incorporate rigorous tasks for all students, nor engage all students in discussions that pushed them to think deeply about concepts presented across disciplines.

Impact

Teaching practices do not consistently immerse all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, in learning activities that maximize their opportunities to demonstrate higher order thinking and high levels of participation in learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers in some classrooms visited engaged students in challenging tasks, such as reading texts to cite evidence for responses to tasks and using academic vocabulary to explain solution to problems. For example, in a fourth grade social studies class, students were asked to read two articles about "life at Jamestown during the 17th century" and use a "Document Analysis Worksheet" to record details and make inferences from the articles. Lessons in other classrooms did not demonstrate the level of rigor seen in these tasks.

- In some classrooms, teachers assigned tasks that evoked discussions, as students quoted evidence from texts to support claims or validate responses to questions. For example, in a third grade social studies lesson, the teacher directed groups of students to rotate across stations around the room to view video clips about Brazil and use post its to categorize details from the video, under headings such as "transportation, people, tradition/culture" and "landscape". Students argued about which details were to be placed in which category, as they engaged in discussions with peers at each station. On the same note, during a social studies lesson a class of fourth grade students cited textual evidence from a "write around" group chart, engaged in peer to peer questioning and used accountable talk stems to build on each other's comments, as they participated in a whole class discussion of insights from their work. The high level of thinking and participation in discussion seen in these lessons was not consistently evident across classrooms visited.

- In most classrooms visited, students worked on differentiated tasks but most teachers did not provide challenging activities for the more advanced learners. For example, in a fourth grade math classroom some students worked quickly in completing the assigned task and did not have an additional task while waiting for several minutes for the teacher who was busy with other students across the room who were struggling to complete the task. A few of the struggling students voiced their frustration as they tried to solve the assigned problems, saying, "This is impossible!" "It doesn't make sense!" and "I can't do it!" Similarly, when a group of first grade students were asked to "review something" using "an opinion, reason and example" frame modeled by the teacher, some students who were able to do the task right away became disengaged while waiting for next steps from the teacher who was working with others.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing

Findings

The school's curricula for most content areas are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and other applicable standards, although challenging tasks that promote rigor and higher order thinking across grades and content areas are not evident in curriculum maps and lesson plans across content and grades.

Impact

While some curricula show a focus on college and career readiness skills for students, they do not consistently incorporate rigorous tasks that offer all students opportunities to be immersed in cognitively demanding activities across content areas and grades.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Common Core aligned curricula such as Teachers' College Reading and Writing units, *My Math* and *Engage NY* resources and New York State scope and sequence to drive instruction in literacy, math and social studies, respectively. Unit and lesson plans show some integration of instructional shifts and there are applications of the Blueprint for the Arts in curricula for instruction in physical education, dance, and visual art.

- Unit plans show tasks requiring students to engage in activities such as solving problems in math, engaging in writing across genres and citing evidence from texts. In addition unit plans include essential questions, unit vocabulary and references to assessments. However, most unit maps viewed showed generic references to activities that did not illustrate emphasis on rigorous tasks, and in some cases, showed minimal content to be taught over several weeks across grade levels. For the most part, rigorous tasks were also not evident in lesson plans viewed. Further, although teachers use a "diary map" to reflect on what worked well in a unit taught and what needs further attention in subsequent units, Teachers' College curriculum documents submitted showed a general overview of ideas for charting instructional maps and tasks, with little evidence that student work and data are incorporated in revisions to or refinement of curricula and tasks across grades and for access by diverse learners.

- The school's curricula did not include unit plans for instruction in science across grades. When asked about the impact of this on students such as fourth grade students who are expected to take the standardized assessment in science before the end of the school year, the principal stated that science instruction will begin in March. The principal added that Full Option Science System (FOSS) kits would be used as the curriculum and subsequently submitted publisher supplied booklets that showed suggested activities for use with the kits. There was no evidence of teacher modification of those activities based on work and data for students, including students in subgroups. Further, a school goal which states that, "By June 2015, the full implementation of a Common Core aligned curriculum will lead to 75% of students in first, second, and third grades increasing three reading levels, as measured by Teachers College Running Records", indicates that the development of Common Core aligned curricula for all grades and content areas is still in an emergent phase.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing

Findings
While there are common assessments aligned to the curricula and applicable standardized assessments in some content areas, consistent use of data from assessments to provide actionable feedback to students and implement targeted instructional moves is not yet evident across classrooms.

Impact
Assessment practices do not yet consistently result in the sharing of feedback that serves as an accurate barometer of student achievement across disciplines as well as a lever for adjustments to curricula and instruction that accelerate students' progress towards learning goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers implement common assessments, including Running Records and Measures of Student Learning assessments in reading, writing and math, assessing students' proficiency and content knowledge related to performance tasks. For example, all students are assessed using Running Records, with students in kindergarten through fourth grade and students who are performing at proficiency level 1 or 2 in reading, having additional cycles of assessment via Running Records throughout the year. All teachers use a common Running Records tool to record and monitor growth in student performance on this assessment. While data from these assessments inform Response to Intervention groupings for small group instruction in reading, there were no documents that evidenced ongoing use of data from assessments to inform targeted adjustments to curricula and instruction across content areas and grades.

- Teachers administer on demand assessments before each unit to gauge what students know about a topic and in some content areas teachers administer assessments for each unit of study. For example, teachers use *My Math* assessments to assess student learning at the end of each unit. Pre-kindergarten classroom teachers create narrative assessments of students and Word Study assessments are implemented in alignment to FUNdations and "Words their Way" curricula.

- Students interviewed showed folders containing samples of their work. However, while some samples of students' work showed teacher comments, others showed only checkmarks with no comments. In addition, in several of the folders examined, there were collections of work that showed no evidence of evaluation by a teacher. Further, although classroom bulletin boards with student work showed some use of a rubric to provide actionable feedback to students via comments and next steps, when asked about how they use a rubric in completing tasks, all of the six students interviewed indicated that they did not use a rubric in doing their work. One student asked, "What's that?" and others pulled out a checklist showing check marks.

- A school wide system for "conferring" individually with each student, allows for regular communication between classroom teachers and service providers, all of whom share findings about students' reading behaviors in a common conferring notebook that each child keeps. However, although the principal states that all teachers who work with that child during reading are responsible for recording conferences in the same notebook, there is little evidence of consistent use of the data gathered to inform adjustments to curricula and instruction or provide feedback to students.

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

Findings

Scheduled professional collaborations allow teams of teachers to share content knowledge and instructional strategies for improving teacher capacity to deliver Common Core aligned instruction for all students. Teacher leadership structures provide some staff members with opportunities to infuse teacher voice in school level decision-making.

Impact

Team meetings allow all teachers to assume responsibility for improving teacher practice and student mastery of applicable performance standards, and contribute to school wide decision-making to improve teacher pedagogy and levels of achievement by all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher schedules, along with a School Based Options Circular 6 period, allow for common planning by small teams of teachers and collaborations by the entire staff across the school. Teacher teams meet weekly, using an agenda and a protocol such as a "Looking at Student Work" protocol to engage in activities that focus attention on meeting the goal of improving student achievement through improved teaching practices. For example during a teacher team meeting observed, teachers examined samples of work from students in first grade, noting the students' strengths and learning needs before discussing possible next steps.

- Teachers interviewed stated that teamwork includes membership in a teacher selected inquiry group focused on professional development activities that support attainment of a teacher selected professional goal that is aligned to one of three competencies of the Danielson Framework for Teaching targeted as areas of focus across all staff. The inquiry groups meet weekly on Mondays, collaboratively planning cycles of professional development activities and next steps for teachers, based on the area of competency selected by each teacher.

- The principal indicated that team meetings include all teachers of the grade, including Response to Intervention teachers, and related service providers. Members of the school's Instructional Team help provide support and next steps to improve student learning outcomes and teacher pedagogy. According to the principal, this has contributed to improvement in teacher pedagogy as evidenced by improved reading levels for the majority of first, second and third grade students, since the start of the school year.

- Teachers at the team meetings stated that they provide regular input in school level decision-making, including the selection of instructional resources. Teacher voice also comes from teacher led teams such as the Instructional Team that meets with the principal afterschool on Wednesdays to plan for school wide instructional initiatives, and the Attendance, Positive Behavior Instructional Support and Children Are Reason Enough teams, which collaborate with all staff to address the academic as well as social emotional needs of all students, especially the most at risk students. Additionally, a Seeking Educational Equity through Diversity team offers teachers opportunities to address issues pertaining to race, class and gender as related to school life.