

# Quality Review Report

## 2016-2017

**Riverdale Avenue Community School**

**Elementary 23K446**

**76 Riverdale Ave.  
Brooklyn  
NY 11212**

**Principal: Meghan Dunn**

**Dates of Review:  
February 10, 2017 and February 14, 2017**

**Lead Reviewer: Rosemary Stuart**

## The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Celebration** to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Focus** to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as **Additional Finding**. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

## Information about the School

Riverdale Avenue Community School serves students in grade PK through grade 5. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm>.

## School Quality Ratings

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area	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	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Area of Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## School Quality Ratings continued

<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Rating</b>
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Rating</b>
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Area of Celebration</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>5.1 Monitoring and Revising Systems</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

The Coordinating Council provides a structure for the entire school community to examine and evaluate policies and decisions regarding school culture, goal setting, organizational resources, and professional development.

### Impact

Policies, practices, and expectations across the school are monitored and adjusted to increase coherence and maintain focus on the professional development teachers need to improve student mastery.

### Supporting Evidence

- The Coordinating Council for the Riverdale Avenue Community School (RACS) is comprised of the principal, upper and lower school coordinators, lead teachers for student activities and attendance, representatives from community based organization partners, the parent coordinator, and other school leaders. This council is the hub of the many committees and programs that are focused on improving the instructional core, school culture, and systems for school improvement. One of the most important functions of this council is to reflect on leadership practices, academic outcomes, and the progress the school is making toward meeting goals. At a meeting in November, school leaders explored their leadership styles and put in place a plan to have leaders be cognizant of how they make complex decisions in the future
- School leaders reflect on the use of resources and the resulting student performance outcomes. As a result of looking at data regarding discipline and suspensions, they realized a large amount of staff capacity in the form of time and energy was needed to address behavioral issues for a small number of early grade children. They also wanted to find alternative academic assignments to minimize suspensions for upper grade students. They assigned a grade five male student to provide tutoring and social-emotional support to a struggling kindergarten male student. The upper grade student avoided an in-house suspension and the kindergarten student improved his ability to persist in academic tasks, sometimes seeking out his partner for in-the-moment support. The partnership lasted throughout the year and formed the model for an expanded mentoring program.
- As part of their frequent examination of progress toward meeting school goals, school leaders analyzed the patterns of attendance for chronically late students. They realized that many of these students were siblings, leading them to start a program of involving the entire family and teachers from different grades in prioritizing on-time attendance by emphasizing its importance in maximizing instructional time and improving academic performance.

## Area of Focus

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Teachers create common assessments and rubrics to guide students in improving their performance on tasks aligned to the curricula and to determine the progress they are making. The analyses of these assessments are not yet used to obtain a clear portrait of student mastery.

### Impact

While most teachers provide actionable feedback to students, they are not yet disaggregating data on student performance on assessments and tasks to target instructional adjustments they make for sub-groups of students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Benchmark assessments in English Language Arts and math are administered every eight weeks and the aggregated and disaggregated results are shared with individual teachers. Instructional leaders review the data to determine if individual teachers need support to address the learning gaps that are identified. For example, as a result of a recent analysis of assessment data, school leaders provided additional professional development on parallel teaching strategies for teachers in co-teaching classrooms. The results of these assessments are not yet tracked to measure the performance of sub-groups such as English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.
- Teachers base pre- and post-assessments on learning progressions that outline the skills students should master from year to year. A snapshot of proficiency levels as of the beginning of February showed that 26 percent of students schoolwide were reading at levels three and four and 20 percent were performing at these levels in math. The analysis indicated the number of ELLs and students with disabilities in the school, but did not disaggregate the performance in reading and math according to groups. While teachers are looking at trends in performance, these data on student performance are not always tracked and do not create a clear picture of student progress that is individualized by class or student.
- Students use rubrics that are grade appropriate to guide their work and explain their performance on the task. A first grade student used an opinion writing rubric from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project that prompts students to check if they have “used words such as *and* and *because*” and included at least one reason for their opinion.
- Teachers provide students with actionable feedback to help them improve their performance. An opinion writing essay by a fifth grader was noted on the rubric to be on grade level for organization and elaboration. The teacher noted that she did a great job including “evidence such as facts, examples, and quotations to support your claim.” As a grow, the teacher suggested that the student “make your conclusion more powerful by offering a final thought...and state further implications.” Another teacher wrote to a second-grade student who had started his project by writing, “Hi! If you want to do something fun you can do art!!” that he had done a great job of getting the reader’s attention. The teacher gave him a specific suggestion on how he could improve his work by including more transition words such as *also* and *however*.

## Additional Finding

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders ensure that curricula are aligned to the standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous tasks are incorporated into unit and lesson plans with a focus on developing higher-order writing and discussion skills.

### Impact

Teachers looping from one grade to the next ensure coherence and vertical alignment of the curricula. Lessons are planned to provide standards-aligned tasks to all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers maintain binders of their lesson plans, including revisions made as a result of student performance outcomes, so they can be shared with other teachers and school leaders. Many teachers loop to the next grade with their students in order to build continuity from grade to grade. The curriculum binders are shared with the teacher who will be teaching the new grade in the following year and are thus an invaluable resource to maintain coherence in the grade from year to year.
- The principal reviews lesson plans to ensure alignment with the standards, the adopted curricular programs, and inclusion of the instructional shifts. The principal provides feedback to teachers on these lesson plans. Feedback to one teacher following an informal observation noted that, "Lesson plans should include appropriate higher order thinking questions." The principal added the recommendation that the teacher should attend an upcoming lesson planning clinic.
- Lesson plans emphasize skills that students need to be successful as they prepare for the next grade and for college. A lesson plan for a third-grade class focused on the development of secondary characters and how they "help the main character along his or her journey." The teacher planned for students to be aware of secondary characters as they discussed their chosen texts in book clubs.
- One Integrated Co-teaching (ICT) class focused on increasing elaboration in writing. The teaching point addressed how students studying "tiny details can lead them to big ideas and interpretations." The plan identified the standards to be addressed, included the objective of the lesson, anticipated potential misconceptions, provided time for independent practice, and identified a small group for focused additional support.

## Additional Finding

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Teachers use a variety of strategies, such as random calling, manipulatives, and small group instruction, to provide entry points into the tasks and discussion for students, including ELLs and students with disabilities.

### Impact

All students are engaged in rigorous discussions and are pushed to higher levels of participation.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers recognize that the learning needs of students often involve pacing activities to allow all students, not only those with Individualized Education Programs, to process information. They provide differentiated opportunities for students to have a break or to use tools, such as fidgets or bouncy seats, or to take additional time to successfully complete tasks.
- Some teachers use grouping to address the learning needs of their students. In one ICT class, one teacher worked with a small group of students on developing English vocabulary skills and adding concrete details to their notebook entries, while the other teacher was working with the rest of the class on annotating a shared text to identify details. In addition, teachers also provide differentiated tasks based on assessed learning. A co-teaching team modified the math tasks for a newly arrived ELL to minimize the required reading skills while eliciting the student's computational skills. First-grade teachers used a task that had some students draw objects with specific measurements while other students measured pictures of objects.
- Teachers utilize engagement strategies such as having students turn and talk to shoulder partners or using randomization strategies when questioning students to increase the level of accountability. In a first-grade lesson, the teacher had students work in pairs to develop a plan to compare the length of her foot with objects in the room. An ELL student suggested she could trace her foot on a piece of paper and hold it against the objects. Another pair of students suggested she cut a piece of string the length of her foot and use that to compare with a poster on the wall. Two students in another class were annotating a shared text, *Danny and the Dinosaur*, and one student explained, "We make jots on the post-it to respond to each other."
- In a kindergarten science lesson, students studied the kinds of animals that live in trees. Students, described as "brave scientists," shared their drawings using a document camera. They showed how they put worms around the roots of the tree, bees and butterflies around the trunk, and monkeys, owls, and woodpeckers in the leaves. The teacher then grouped the students, according to the animal they chose, to create a model of their animal to place on a tree made from boxes. The model tree included a hollow for a nest, which provided an opportunity for a high-level discussion of the meaning of that word.
- In a fourth-grade class, students explored the ways different shaped pattern blocks fit around a vertex to determine their interior angle measures. An open-ended task in this same lesson asked students to apply what they know about angles to discuss the times on an analog clock when the hands form a 90 degree angle. Writing tasks also demonstrated high levels of student thinking. Another grade four student wrote in an essay that being a girl is tough and that facing obstacles, "makes us stronger because learning to stand up to negative people...boosts our confidence."

## Additional Finding

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders effectively and consistently communicate high expectations to staff, as reflected in the school's motto. Staff at the school works with parents to explain what their children need to accomplish to be successful in middle school and eventually in college.

### Impact

School leaders provide coaching and hold teachers accountable for meeting stated expectations. Families understand the progress their children are making to meet grade-level expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school mission statement outlines the motto, “resilience plus awareness plus collaboration equals success” which echoes the acronym for the school, *RACS*. The mission statement elaborates on the responsibilities of the entire community to support the educational goals of the school, “It is incumbent on all of us to work together to ensure that the needs of students, parents, and staff are met.” The motto is displayed throughout the school and is included in the parent and staff handbooks.
- School leaders hold teachers accountable for meeting professional expectations as outlined in the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, and provide professional learning opportunities and coaching support to achieve those expectations. For example, coaching plans include working with individual teachers on topics such as mini-lesson execution, conferring, and small group instruction. The principal meets with teachers for mid-year meetings to monitor their professional growth. The principal includes anecdotes in the Riverdale Weekly newsletter that celebrate the practices that reflect her expectations for instruction, such as describing how one teacher modeled a writing elaboration to a small group of students.
- Report cards provide performance levels for identified skills in reading, writing, math, and social studies. For example, a report card for a second-grade student indicated that the student was a level three in measuring in standard units, but was a level two in narrative writing, giving his parents a clear picture of his progress toward meeting standards-based expectations. Performance reports are customized for ELLs and students with disabilities. A report card from the English as a New Language teacher indicated that one student is always willing to try, even if he does not yet have the vocabulary in English.
- Parents are actively involved in the middle school articulation process. Every family, unless they opt out, meets with a staff member to discuss middle school options for their fifth grade children. The co-located middle school holds workshops for parents to explain the academic expectations of middle school. Parents agreed that teachers discuss how children are being prepared for success in the next grade at curriculum nights and parent-teacher conferences. Students agreed that teachers inform them of their reading levels and that they are working to improve their writing. One student stated, “I want to write like a real writer.”
- During family involvement month, which was started by the School Leadership Team, parents conducted instructional walkthroughs with notetaking guides to learn about the strategies the teachers use to engage students. The notetaking guide for one walkthrough that focused on classroom libraries prompted parents to determine if their children could access books on their reading level. At the beginning of the year, teachers held meetings for parents to explain the grade-level math curriculum. One parent spoke about the value of being aware of what her child was learning in math and noted that her fourth grader was learning how to write computer code.



## Additional Finding

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Teachers are engaged in regular collaborative team meetings focused on examining student performance and they consistently analyze data for their students using inquiry-based protocols.

### Impact

Teachers support each other as they improve their pedagogical skills and focus on improving student performance.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders identified instructional foci and cycles of inquiry for the upper and lower grades as part of their work with another school in the Learning Partners Program. In grades three to five, teacher teams are focusing on increasing stamina and volume in writing while the lower grade teachers are planning for intellectually engaging read alouds. The inquiry cycle for the upper grade teachers begins with an analysis of student writing and research that includes reading a text on writing strategies. After implementing the identified strategies, the cycle concludes and begins again with an analysis of the subsequent student writing.
- Members of the grade four and five inquiry team engaged in a protocol to examine extended writing responses as part of their goal of increasing writing stamina and volume. After exchanging persuasive essays, they annotated the student work, noticing when students made claims or counterclaims and making suggestions for how the essay could be improved. For example, on an essay to convince the school principal to ban chocolate milk from the cafeteria, a team member noted a next step is to “work on conclusion” in order to “leave the reader something to ponder.” The teachers celebrated that most students were able to structure a five-paragraph essay and included evidence to support their claims. They also questioned if this skill is transferrable because they are not seeing the same structure in their students’ notebook writing. The team decided to build time into their lessons for students to revise their notebook entries using the same process they use for published writing.
- Teachers indicated that these collaborations help them to be better teachers because they learn from each other and share best practices. One teacher noted that she has been working closely with a student who could only write one sentence and as a result of the strategies she had implemented to increase writing volume, “Now she is writing paragraphs.” Another teacher stated that she used to base her planned instruction for the lowest level students but now feels she “can help students at or above level.”