NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Office of Accountability

Differentiated Accountability – School Quality Review (SQR)

SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW REPORT

BEDS Code:	421800010004
District Name:	Syracuse City School District
School Name:	Bellevue Elementary School
School Address:	530 Stolp Ave., Syracuse, NY 13207
Principal:	Joanne Harlow
Accountability Phase/Category:	Improvement (year- 1) - Comprehensive
Area of Identification:	English Language Arts - All Students; African American Students; White Students; Students with Disabilities and Economically Disadvantaged Students
Dates of On-site Review:	November 7- 8, 2011

PART 1: MISSION STATEMENT

"The mission of the Bellevue School Community as an open-spaced, inclusive setting of diverse learners is to ensure that all students become responsible life-long learners who will master defined skills, gain knowledge, and appreciate diversity. This will be accomplished through cooperative learning opportunities, collaboration, and shared decision-making among staff, students, family and community, ensuring that the Bellevue School learning environment responds to the individual needs of all students."

PART 2: SCHOOL STRENGTHS

- Bellevue Elementary (ES) has implemented an effective Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program, including a popular incentive program for students. Students are typically well behaved, and the school has developed an intervention plan that enables them to work with the small number of disruptive students. Interventions vary depending on the severity of the problems, based on the school's Response to Intervention (RTI) model.

- All students participate in core academic programming, including students identified as students with disabilities.

- As a participant in Syracuse's *Say Yes* program the school has an extended afterschool program four days a week, plus a summer program. *Say Yes* also provides two additional social workers and additional supports for families including mental health and legal services.

- Bellevue has a strong School Leadership Team (SLT) that participates in leadership activities within the school and works collaboratively with the school leader.

- Teachers use the daily half-hour Urban Teacher Calendar Time (UTC) as well as additional common planning time each day to work on data analysis, the New York State (NYS) P-12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), grade level planning, lesson planning and other staff development activities. Teachers work collaboratively, provide notes of meetings to the school leader and meet with the school leader to provide updates. This collaboration sets an excellent foundation for continuous improvement.

PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND UTILIZATION OF DATA

FINDINGS:

- The school staff receives benchmark assessment data from the District, but does little to analyze and interpret it beyond using it to group students. Staff have not analyzed in-depth achievement trends, performance data, subgroups or other patterns in developing the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) to address the academic needs of students or identify needed changes in programming.

- Data results from State assessments, SRI, DIEBELS and Treasures indicate that the percent of students reaching proficiency remains relatively unchanged over the past several years from kindergarten through grade 5.

- The school uses some informal formative and summative data at a basic level to monitor student outcomes, but the information measured is primarily low-level skills and basic factual level recall questions. The primary use for data results at this time is to place students in groups, although teachers are asked to identify skills not learned by large groups of students for re-teaching and for possible changes in instruction. While teachers do review students' overall scores on assessments required by the District and may use results to change student assignments to specific reading groups or to identify students needing re-teaching, they do not yet use assessment results to review and hone their own instructional strategies or to revise instructional plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders with District support should analyze data patterns in depth to improve student learning results, including identification of subgroup patterns and student growth profiles. Other important data such as attendance, tardiness and suspension data should be examined. Paul Bambrick-Santoyo's Driven By Data. may serve as a reference.

- Professional development (PD) should define strategies and protocols for using data to identify specific skills needed by students and to monitor the effectiveness of interventions for each student and specific subgroups. with the goal of selecting and/or modifying instruction to match the needs of students. The school should ensure that student growth is tracked and that all students are on a trajectory to proficiency. Since students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged student subgroups score significantly lower than other subgroups, the school should ensure a focus on these subgroups.

- School leadership should work with grade level teams to use results of summative, interim and formative assessments to evaluate instructional practices, plan instructional strategies that will ensure student instruction is rigorous and includes opportunities for conceptual learning. Grade level teams should regularly analyze progress on moving towards greater rigor in instruction.

II. TEACHING AND LEARNING

FINDINGS:

- The school lacks a rigorous instructional action plan based on analysis of data. The current plan is based primarily on the District-adopted textbooks in English language arts (ELA), *Treasures,* and mathematics, Think *Math*.

- The review team observed that the quality of lesson plans is inconsistent. A few include student-friendly objectives and activities while others lack detail. There are few instances of the use of higher order questions, student-intensive problem-solving or hands-on activities. Since teachers are expected to closely follow *Treasures* and *Think Math*, lesson plans reflect the teacher handbooks for these programs with few extensions or accommodations. School leaders do not regularly review lesson plans or provide detailed feedback during walkthroughs.

- The review team observed that ELA instruction consists of students rotating through independent and teacher-led centers, with most center work focusing on students completing multiple workbook pages. Students rotate from teacher to teacher during ELA (a practice called "walk to read'), moving from classroom to classroom for different skills. One teacher focuses on writing, another on vocabulary. Teachers use the *Treasures* textbook and materials for all work; as the series is heavily focused on vocabulary, much of the student work is isolated vocabulary drill. The review team observed the inconsistent use of evidence based strategies.

- The review team observed students working independently in learning centers; however, the work is primarily low-level, basic worksheets. Teachers often do not ensure that students either understand the task to be completed or are able to work collaboratively on challenging yet doable tasks. Therefore, students often do not effectively practice new skills and in some instances repeatedly complete tasks incorrectly, reinforcing errors. The review team noted little opportunity to read extensively or to practice self-correction strategies.

- The level of rigor and relevance during instruction is consistently low, with little focus on challenging learning opportunities for students. Although *Treasures* has many short non-fiction articles that could be used to develop in-depth concepts or challenge students to think deeply and try out new ideas, teacher questions are primarily low-level. Students in learning centers often do not have the required comprehension skills to independently determine what they are reading. Hands-on materials, such as science kits and resources, maps, manipulatives and other hands-on materials are not available to help them understand underlying concepts.

- Significantly more teacher talk than student talk was observed by the review team. Teachers quickly provided answers when a child did not respond. A few teachers also permitted students to simply copy vocabulary definitions from the teacher's cards instead of working with students to help them build their own knowledge.

- Teachers often explain assignments verbally, in great detail, rather than teaching students strategies that will enable them to process directions themselves. The review team observed teachers reading text aloud rather than modeling and scaffolding the process so that students can learn to do the task on their own. Questions are typically low level, often requiring single word responses, and teachers do not always seem to ensure that all students reach mastery before continuing on to the next task.

- Although students rotate through learning centers, the work within each center is the same for all students. The review team noted that accommodations or differentiation of tasks was not evident.

- The school schedule includes a daily half-hour for all content area instruction (social studies and science) at the end of the day, however, many teachers do not use the time for content area instruction. Because content area instruction is so limited, students lack a solid, connected understanding of the required social studies and science curriculum.

- The afterschool program has an academic time followed by a period of enrichment. During the academic portion of the program, students typically sit at desks, completing more reading and mathematics worksheets. The pattern of not checking to determine if a student is completing tasks correctly continued from the school day in the majority of classrooms. A few primary level classes were engaging, with students playing educational games and the teacher actively involved. Much of the instruction in the afterschool program appeared to be simple low-level practice of basic skills, and classroom management skills were minimal in some classrooms. Not all staff who were working as teachers were certified.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- All teachers should be expected to develop evidence-based lesson plans using curriculum that is aligned to the NYS P-12 CCLS that include an emphasis on in-depth development of underlying concepts, as opposed to isolated, low-level skills. Instruction should focus on teaching students how to interpret texts, how to monitor their own understanding and other critical comprehension skills.

- School leaders should ensure consistent, high-level lesson planning and instruction in every classroom by reviewing and monitoring lesson plans and instruction during observations and walkthroughs. Timely feedback should be provided to teachers with expectations for implementation.

- The school should consider alternate structures for ELA instruction that allow students more time with a single teacher and links ELA and writing into more vigorous content area instruction.

- Teachers should carefully plan center work with specific goals for students to learn how to work collaboratively. Each student should have specific roles and be taught a collaborative process. Also, center tasks should be sufficiently complex problems to solve or concepts to explore, but students should never be given work they cannot do correctly, as that reinforces incorrect work. Worksheets should not be a significant part of center work.

- Rigor and relevance should be a major focus of implementation of high quality learning units aligned with the CCLS. Per Robert Marzano's Classroom Instruction That Works, these units should include:

  - collaborative unit development, possibly including cross-content area collaboration;

- strong student-focused learning objectives that describe specific student learning;
- pre-planned higher-order questions;
- research-based questioning strategies that require in-depth student thinking;
- assessments linked to learning objectives and continuous formative monitoring of student progress;
- regular use of rubrics by both teachers and students;
- emphasis on in-depth conceptual understanding as opposed to surface level mastery;
- direct instruction in "learning to learn" strategies that develop students' ability to problem solve and develop ownership of their own learning;
- urgency in use of time;
- consistent use of instructional routines; and
- high achievement for all students, with carefully planned accommodations and differentiation.

- Through collaboration during common planning time and PD opportunities provided by the District, teachers should learn to plan instruction that has the students actively involved in working collaboratively, talking, thinking, providing explanations and processing information so that they become proactive learners. The school leaders should implement regular observations and walkthroughs to ensure that this is consistently occurring.

- Teachers should ensure that they model ("I do, we do, and you do"), scaffold and provide sufficient practice so that students can work independently. Questions should be pre-created and require critical thinking, analysis, interpretation and discussion.

- Teachers should investigate the effective use of centers and increase expectations of what students are to accomplish during center time. Teachers should monitor student understanding and ability to work in centers, possibly by beginning with all students working in centers and the teacher assessing student interactions and understanding of tasks. When necessary, several levels of a similar task should be made available to meet the varying needs of students.

- The school leader should ensure that students have the required amount of instructional time in social studies and science and a wide range of resources, including maps, globes, and science resources so that students have opportunities to explore and understand underlying concepts. Some pieces of *Treasures* or other text-based materials could become a part of a carefully planned content area instruction.

- The school leadership should review the afterschool programming to ensure that the program is high quality and engaging for students and that it is effectively aligned with the school day program. School and District leaders should ensure that the quality of all staff involved in after school instruction.

III. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

FINDINGS:

- Although teachers meet regularly to plan, in more than one instance teachers report that planning meetings frequently end up with time being used to discuss low priority topics, with little time to discuss actual instruction. Teacher teams determine what skills will be taught and when they will be taught. Therefore, teachers on each grade level have the same basic schedule and teach the same skills at the same time, although specific instruction may vary from room to room.

- While the school leader monitors instruction through classroom observations, including quick scans of lesson plans and the SLT has lesson planning and increasing rigor as a priority in the CEP, there is still significant inconsistency across the school in developing effective lesson plans. Plans do not consistently include focused student learning objectives, use of evidence-based instructional strategies, instruction that teaches deep conceptual understanding and strategies that enable students to develop higher level learning strategies.

- School leaders have not focused on developing a system that monitors student progress and ensures urgency in learning and implementing the most effective strategies for moving all students to proficiency.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Teacher teams should have specific goals and assigned roles within each team meeting. At the end of a meeting, the goals for the next meeting should be established to help the team stay focused.

- The school leadership should implement a classroom observation schedule to monitor more closely the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Written feedback should be provided for all formal, informal and walkthrough observations, including clear targets for improvement. Follow-up observations should be included in the schedule to check on progress. The school should seek support from the District in developing lesson observation protocols, including training for school leaders in writing effective teacher feedback. The outcomes of lesson observations should provide a focus for the school PD plan.

- School leaders should be actively involved in the analysis and use of data to drive instructional decisions regarding the alignment of the curriculum with the CCLS, implementation of curriculum and assessment and routinely providing coaching and supervision for curriculum, assessment, and instruction. School leaders should also set the tone for urgency in ensuring that student learning is improving and celebrate significant successes with the school staff.

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

FINDINGS:

- The school has daily Academic Intervention Services (AIS) in ELA for all students, but no AIS for mathematics. The AIS instruction observed by the review team was focused on basic skills rather than providing instruction needed to move students to a higher level.

- The school schedule has only a daily 40-minute period dedicated to all content area instruction, and many teachers use this time for other activities. Teachers state that the reading program, *Treasures*, has a focus on expository reading, so they are doing "science" or "social studies" during ELA. *Treasures*, however, is not a systemic course of instruction in either social studies or science. The school lacks physical resources such as maps, globes and science equipment that are needed, as well.

- Most parents report that they do not feel involved in their children's schooling. They report that there are few positive phone calls home. While they participate in some "fun" activities and a small group of parents are heavily involved, other parents feel they have limited voice in matters that directly affect their children's learning and achievement.

- Much of the after school *Say Yes* program's academic component consists of worksheets, with minimal teacher involvement with students. Not all *Say Yes* staff are certified teachers and a few lack effective classroom management strategies. Transitions during the *Say Yes* program, especially from the cafeteria, were difficult, with some older students tussling and trying to leave on their own. The length of time it took to move students was excessive and older students were not supervised and left a mess behind. More supervision is definitely needed, especially during transitions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The school should review the AIS program and ensure that support is available for students who are not proficient in mathematics. Many youngsters who have difficulty in mathematics benefit from significantly more time developing an understanding of underlying concepts through the use of manipulatives and small group instruction.

- The school should consider this issue as part of the work on CCLS and unit design, with an understanding that instruction in the core content areas is more than inserting occasional texts about science or social studies into the ELA program. The goal should be to develop strong, engaging instructional units that build student ability to problem solve and encourage in-depth understanding of the world they live in.

- The school should re-establish organizational structures and processes to ensure that students, families, and community members play an active and sustained role in school governance, decision-making, and problem-solving through e.g., a parent subcommittee.

- The school leadership should work closely with the *Say Yes* afterschool program in extending and enriching student learning in conjunction with the overall school program. In addition, staff hired for *Say Yes* should be monitored in the same way as regular day teachers, with high expectations for lesson planning and classroom management skills.

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FINDINGS:

- School leaders and staff do not regularly evaluate their work with students or plan for improving performance. Therefore, the number of students reaching proficiency remains essentially the same across grade levels.

- Teachers are not held accountable for incorporating PD practices into their instructional practice. There is no mention of the PD found in the observation reports.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The District should support the school staff in determining how best to develop a culture of high expectations for every student, and then through PD build the structure and protocols that will enable teachers to ensure every student meets those high expectations.

- The school leadership should conduct follow-up observations after PD sessions to ensure that teachers incorporate the strategies learned into their instructional practice. The school leaders should develop detailed feedback based on the PD provided with specific next steps to provide a focus their next observation.

VI. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

FINDINGS:

- There are insufficient numbers of working computers with internet access, LCD projectors and/or SMART Boards, and printers to support classroom instruction. Staff has significant difficulties in planning instruction that relies on use of any type of technology.

- The school building has an open-space, school-without-walls layout so that there is noise overflow across classroom spaces making it problematic for students who have difficulty learning in noisy environments.

- Little student work is displayed, and none had any reference to the NYS Learning Standards and performance indicators.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Inadequate numbers of working computers and SMART Boards is a District-wide problem that the new District leadership has identified. Some schools manage to add to their technology through mini-grants and donations. Hopefully, the District will be able to support additional school-based technology. The District should develop a set of specific guidelines that schools could use to add to their technology so that any additions meet District specifications. Accessing grants, and using NYSED's Computer Recycling for Educational Technology Enhancement (CREATE) program that donates computers excessed by NYS agencies (http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/ssae/AltEd/create/home.html) should be explored.

- The school should consider creating soundproof walls in some areas and/or other sound-proofing to decrease the level of noise.

- Student work should be displayed and celebrated prominently both within classrooms and in public areas. Rubrics should be used as an integral tool in planning and assessing assignments. Teachers should participate in PD activities that model the use of rubrics and provide teacher feedback, peer feedback and student self-assessment. School leaders should monitor student work on display and evaluate the quality of feedback that is provided to ensure that it helps students improve and move to the next level.

PART 3: CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The findings and recommendations noted in the report are intended to guide the school's inquiry, planning, and the development of the CEP for school year 2012-13. The school should also continue its efforts in the implementation of the following Regents Reform Agenda initiatives: P-12 CCLS, Data Driven Instruction and the Annual Professional Performance Reviews for teacher effectiveness.