

**NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Office of Accountability**

Differentiated Accountability – School Quality review (SQR)

SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW REPORT

BEDS Code:	421800010010
District Name:	Syracuse City School District
School Name:	J. T. Roberts PreK-8 School
School Address:	715 Glenwood Ave., Syracuse, NY 13207
Principal:	Janet Kimatian
Accountability Phase/Category:	Improvement (year 1) -Focused
Area of Identification:	English Language Arts - African American Students; Students with Disabilities; and Economically Disadvantaged Students
Dates of On-site Review:	December 19-21, 2011

PART 1: MISSION STATEMENT

“The mission of J.T. Roberts School is to cultivate inquiring, open minded and caring young people. Roberts’ students will seek to create a better world through the pursuit of knowledge and reflective consideration of global perspectives.

To meet this end, the school community works in an inclusive educational model with the support of community, government and higher education organizations. Utilizing local, national and global initiatives we will ensure challenging and rigorous standards for academic and personal growth.

This focus encourages students to become active, honest citizens, capable of solving emerging world issues with compassion and respect for themselves and for our global community.”

PART 2: SCHOOL STRENGTHS

- The school is part of the Syracuse University ‘School of Promise’ program, which supports schools as they move to a complete inclusion of students with disabilities model. All students K-8 are educated within the regular education setting.
- In PreK-5, every teacher knows every child well, academically and social-emotionally, and sees all children as belonging to all teachers. Teachers communicate effectively with each other regarding student needs.
- There is evidence that teachers regularly use common planning time to plan collaboratively.
- Assessment data are regularly used to determine flexible groupings for instruction in grades K-5.

- The school is effectively implementing the "Good Behavior" game, a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach that rewards children for appropriate on-task behaviors during instructional times and provides positive supports for appropriate classroom behavior in elementary classrooms.
- Classroom routines are solidly implemented in grades K-5. Students know expected routines and were even observed correcting each other. These routines lead to effective use of time for instruction.
- There is a strong culture of professionalism and collaboration across instructional staff.
- The afterschool *Say Yes* program is well-designed and implemented; students were engaged in and enthusiastic about learning.

PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND UTILIZATION OF DATA

FINDINGS:

- Staff receive benchmark assessment data from the District, but do little to analyze and interpret it beyond using it to group students. They have not analyzed in-depth achievement trends, performance data, subgroup analyses, attendance, or other patterns in developing their Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP), or used data to identify needed changes in programming.
- The school does not have an effective process for on-going program evaluation.
- While teachers regularly collect and review student benchmark assessments, they do not determine precisely what underlying skills each assessment measures, so they are unable to accurately determine links across various assessments.
- The staff is beginning to use school-level formative, interim and summative data for planning and monitoring student progress, but implementation is inconsistent across grades and within specific grade levels. Most assessments observed during the review were teacher-graded, with little written explanation of criteria used for grading or of steps the student could take to improve. Only a few instances of rubric use were observed; there were no observed instances of a teacher explaining a rubric to students or asking students to self-assess.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders with District support should work to analyze patterns and processes in-depth in order to improve student learning results. They should review subgroup patterns and student growth profiles. The school might consider using Paul Bambrick-Santoyo's [Driven By Data](#) and or any of Victoria Bernhardt's books ([Data Analysis for Continuous School Improvement](#), [Data, Data Everywhere](#), [Using Data to Improve Student Learning](#)) and to factor in other important data such as attendance, tardiness and suspension data.

- School leaders, including the School Leadership Team (SLT), Instructional Support Coach, and other teachers, should receive in-depth instruction in what constitutes effective evidence of academic improvement, including support in learning to develop meaningful evidence statements and in evaluating growth on an ongoing basis.
- Teachers should be provided with support in determining the specific, underlying standards and goals that tests actually measure and in determining how tests differ in what they measure.
- The SLT and other school leaders should work with grade level teams during professional development (PD) in using results of summative, interim and formative assessments to evaluate instructional practices, and in selecting strategies that ensure instruction is rigorous and providing students with opportunities for deep conceptual learning. Further, teams should be regularly expected to analyze their progress in moving towards greater rigor in instruction.

II. TEACHING AND LEARNING

FINDINGS:

- The level of rigor and relevance during instruction was low in all but a few advanced classes, with little access to challenging learning opportunities for the majority of students.
- Independent student work in learning centers was low-level, with many worksheets, and teachers often did not ensure that students either understood the task to be completed or were able to work collaboratively on a challenging, yet doable, task.
- The quality of lesson plans and instruction was inconsistent. While some lesson plans included student-friendly objectives and activities, many were weak and had few or no learning goals. There were few instances of higher order questions, differentiation, student-intensive problem-solving or hands-on activities.
- The majority of students in many intermediate and middle level classrooms were not engaged in learning. Initial instruction in middle level classrooms was typically not well-planned and lacked both rigor and relevance, resulting in a lack of student engagement. In many classes, students simply kept talking quietly among themselves, ignoring the teacher. In other classrooms, students carefully watched the teacher while passing notes, playing games or talking.
- There was little evidence of use of rubrics to guide expectations for student work or to provide feedback to students, even in instances, such as when students were listening to peers' reports, where student evaluation would typically be expected. Similarly, little evidence of teachers providing instruction in student self-assessment or progress monitoring was observed. Posted student work had no rubrics displayed.
- Middle level classes were often grouped by ability. Instruction for high ability groups was markedly more organized and well planned than for low ability groups, even when the same teacher taught both sections. Teachers had significantly different expectations for different groups, with students in "regular" groups expected to do less well. Teachers typically did not develop lessons designed to engage students or provide information needed for deep conceptual understanding. Further, the school does not provide

strong intervention strategies for at-risk students; instead, there seemed to be an acceptance of the status quo for students.

- The school is just beginning to enroll English language learners (ELLs) and is still in transition. Many classroom teachers have been trained in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), but the school could use additional support in effective implementation and an additional .5 English as Second Language (ESL) teacher.
- There is minimal systematic or organized content area instruction; students entering grades 6-8 have inadequate background in social studies and science leading to academic problems for many students in those middle grades. Students in grades K-5 have a single thirty minute period daily for all instruction in the core content areas of science and social studies. They rely instead on a selection of short content area reading selections from the District reading text, *Treasures*.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Rigor and relevance should be a focus of consistent and collaborative development and implementation of high quality learning units based on Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Units should reflect evidence based-practices, such as those described in Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement, 2nd Edition (Marzano), focusing on:
 - collaborative unit development, 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 skill 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.
- Teachers should carefully plan learning center work and include specific goals for students to learn to work collaboratively. Each student should have specific roles and be taught a collaborative process. Also, learning center tasks should be sufficiently complex so that students have a meaningful problem to solve. Teachers should evaluate tasks and ensure that students can independently manage the tasks.

- All teachers should be expected to develop lesson plans aligned to the 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 focus PD specifically for intermediate and middle level teachers on effective instructional strategies for middle level students, including development of interdisciplinary instruction, effective development of critical thinking and problem solving strategies and ensuring that all students are fully engaged.
- There should be PD in the uses of rubrics, including both teacher use and the importance of rubrics in developing students' ownership of their own learning.
- School staff should regularly use a part of their common planning time to chart student growth and develop plans that ensure each student is on a trajectory to proficiency. Lessons should include a wide range of strategies to support different learning styles, and teachers should ensure that students remain engaged and are actively learning.
- The District ELL staff should continue their support as the school develops its ELL program. If resources permit, an additional .5 ELL teacher should be assigned to the school.
- The school should increase time spent on content area instruction in K-5 so students have the required level of instruction in social studies and science. There should be a wide range of resources, including maps, globes, and science resources so students have opportunities to understand underlying concepts. Some pieces of *Treasures* or other text-based materials could become a part of carefully planned content area instruction.

III. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

FINDINGS:

- School leaders conduct regular walkthroughs and comment on lesson plans, but the current state of lesson plans analyzed by the review team indicates that current review and intervention procedures have not ensured quality plans.
- The school does not have a plan-adjust cycle that updates policies, mentors staff who are new to the building, and ensures that clear school-wide instructional goals exist.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The school leadership should provide greater supervision of instruction, including regular review of notes from grade level planning sessions, regular review of instructional units and lesson plans, and more structured classroom walkthroughs. If possible, school leaders should work with the District to set aside longer PD/planning times for teachers to work collaboratively, with support, to develop strong instructional units.

- Given the realities of current fiscal constraints, it is likely that transfers within the District will be more prevalent than new staffing, and transferred teachers are likely to need support during transition. The District should support schools in developing a transition plan that orients transferred teachers to their new schools and provides support for them during their transition.

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

FINDINGS:

- The school's demographics have changed over the past several years, including drawing families who live farther from the school and from a wider socio-economic status, but outreach to parents has continued to focus on the school's immediate neighborhood. Parents who live farther from the school or who are not able to drop by informally report that they often do not receive sufficient advance notification of events or regular information about their children's progress. Many reported that they are only contacted if there is a problem. They would like more frequent feedback, including positive feedback and suggestions on how they can support their children. They also noted that the school report card provides little specific information that can be used to help their children. Both groups of parents would like more information about District and State initiatives.
- There is a lack of focus and effort on ensuring that every student succeeds. Instruction and expectations vary, particularly in the upper grades, with many students sitting in classes that are not engaging and turning in work that is not their best. Observations of middle level classes by the review team noted significant differences in quality of instruction, levels of teacher preparation for these classes and expectations for student learning and behavior. Too many students are not challenged or engaged, and in many classes students paid little attention to the teacher and spent class time talking with classmates and being generally disruptive.
- While the overall culture of the school is safe and supportive, a significant number of students reported bullying and a lack of adult diligence in ensuring that it stops.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The school should develop strategies that build links between parents and the school. The school leadership should ask the District's Parent Partner Network to work with them to identify and implement strategies and to survey parents regarding their needs. The school should also provide a long-range events calendar, with a weekly newsletter and/or class newsletters for parents. As the District has translators available, the school should communicate with families of immigrant students in their own languages. The school should institute a policy of teachers calling and/or emailing parents who live farther from the school that they are more regularly contacted. Positive calls home should be equally as important as those reporting problems.
- School staff should track and evaluate each student's progress, with an expectation for rigorous, engaging education for every student. There should be a greater focus on ensuring that all instruction is carefully planned, that instructional strategies are based on the best evidence-based research and that classes focus on building deep conceptual understanding. Based on current research that indicates that many youngsters learn most effectively through hands-on, experiential learning, the school should also explore the development of instructional units that encourage constructivist unit design.

- The school should develop an anti-bullying program that focuses on building positive relationships between students and provides students with strategies for dealing proactively with bullying. Teachers should focus on developing awareness of the subtle signs of bullying and develop a schoolwide plan to teach students strategies for positively working with others.

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FINDINGS:

- The school has a range of regular PD, including Harry Wong (classroom management). About half of the teachers have completed SIOP training, and teachers are learning about CCLS. There is, however, evidence that many teachers are not implementing the strategies that they have learned during PD.
- While the school has no teachers newly hired to the District, they do have teachers who transferred from other schools and are new to the building. There are no procedures for assisting these “new to the building” teachers in learning the school's common procedures or to support those who have made significant transitions from another grade level.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leadership should ensure regular monitoring to identify teachers who are not implementing effective instructional strategies and ensure they are made aware of the expectation that they implement PD. Embedded PD if necessary should be provided. Monitoring should include focused walkthroughs, with sufficient time in each classroom to evaluate instruction and implementation of PD, as well as regular, in-depth reviews of and feedback regarding lesson plans. Supports might include Cognitive Coaching and Learning (CCL) as well as focused co-teaching and modeling by the school’s instructional coach. Any staff identified as in need of support should be assigned support and progress should be monitored.
- Because the District must deal with a significant number of teacher transfers, some based on teacher requests and others involuntary, they should have a transition plan that supports schools in developing an orientation to the new position. It should include both regular school routines and support in teaching different levels of students that provides transferred staff with the skills needed to do their new job effectively.

VI. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

FINDINGS:

- The school has very limited technology and is not wired for Internet. Each grade level team has a shared document camera, and there are two SMART Boards available. There is a single computer lab plus 3 mobile carts of computers. The District ESL department has provided a classroom set of iPads (35) for the fourth grade, as that is the grade with the greatest concentration of ESL students. The parent organization leads stated that they had been advised that their support in fund raising for additional technology was not permitted.

- The library media center has a wide range of books and is a pleasant site for children, but has extremely limited technology.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The District should ensure the creation and implementation of a District level technology plan that supports individual schools in developing school and classroom appropriate technology. There seems to be discrepant information across schools as to whether they can write grants or whether parent groups can support development of technology. Within a broader District framework that defines set criteria that is acceptable and will work within the system, the district should support schools in grant writing so that they can secure more technology for all schools.
- The school should develop a plan for making the media center accessible for students at a variety of times (before, during, after school) and adding more technology.

PART 4: CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The findings and recommendations noted in the report are intended to guide the school's inquiry, planning, and the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan (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 Common Core Learning Standards, Data Driven Instruction and the Annual Professional Performance Reviews for teacher effectiveness.

As a school in transition, staff should re-envision their mission, finding ways to bring all parents and students together and focus on ensuring equity of excellence for every student in the school. This will require a strong focus on community building, higher expectations for every child, and a consistent provision of high quality instructional practices, as delineated in the above report.