

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

Differentiated Accountability - School Quality Review (SQR)

SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW REPORT

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| BEDS Code: | 580512030015 |
| District Name: | Brentwood Union Free School District |
| School Name: | Laurel Park Elementary School |
| School Address: | 48 Swan Place, Brentwood, NY 11717 |
| Principal: | Eric Snell |
| Accountability Phase/Category: | Improvement (year- 1) – Focused English Language Arts- Students with Disabilities; English Language Learners and Economically Disadvantaged |
| Area of Identification: | Students |
| Dates of On-site Review: | January 20 and 30, 2012 |

PART 1: MISSION STATEMENT

"The mission of Laurel Park is to provide our students with an academically stimulating and safe learning environment. Collectively, the Laurel Park community of our staff, students, and families are responsible for the physical, intellectual, emotional, and social needs of our students. We strive to provide an academically stimulating environment utilizing the State standards, which allow the students to realize their full potential. As a community, Laurel Park encourages the students to be tolerant of others' individuality, develop a sense of responsibility for their actions, and acquire the skills needed to be productive citizens in our ever changing world."

PART 2: SCHOOL STRENGTHS

- The school is welcoming and child-centered. Positive interactions among students and between students and adults were evident throughout the school. Students knew the school rules and followed them. The school is clean and well-maintained.
- The commitment of the school leaders and teachers for teaching students and their concern for the students' well-being are noteworthy.
- Throughout the school, the review team observed students using computers for instruction that is directly connected to the literacy programs. Teachers used SMART Boards as a regular part of their daily activities.

- Student work is displayed in the halls, and projects to encourage student excellence are displayed in a showcase in the front lobby.

PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND UTILIZATION OF DATA

FINDINGS:

- Teachers in grades one, two and three use the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments.
- The reading consultant is an important resource for the teachers.
- Considerable data is collected and available to the teachers. The English language arts (ELA) assessments and practice assessments provide additional data.
- Writing portfolios, running records and conference notes are being used at the school as the paradigm shifts from teaching skills to teaching reading.
- Each year, struggling students receive four benchmark assessments, while their peers receive three benchmark assessments. This is a relatively new practice at the school and it is unclear if the benchmarks are administered in a consistent manner throughout the school. It is also unclear how individual teachers use them.
- The review team was unable to ascertain if the benchmarks are being used to group and regroup students during the school year.
- While there is a considerable amount of data available, the degree to which formative assessments are being used was not evident to the review team.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Expectations for student growth, as indicated by the benchmark assessments, should be established and monitored.
- The teachers, reading consultant and school leader should analyze the data and create action plans to improve student performance. Formative, interim and summative assessment data should be used to inform instruction.
- Increased attention should be given to the use of existing formative assessments and the creation of additional ones. As this work progresses, each teacher should be required to analyze data for individual students in her/his class and for the class as a whole.
- Teachers should set improvement goals and develop an action plan for targeted students on how they will assist these students to achieve the goals.

- As appropriate, the action plans should be shared with the students so that they participate more actively in their own learning.
- The school leader and reading consultant should monitor growth of English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.
- The teachers should develop an assessment handbook for grades one to three.
- Rubrics for each assessment should be included in the handbook along with strategies for students to use so that they can set their own learning goals and monitor their progress.
- The Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments that are given in the bilingual classes should be given to each student in Spanish and English, the data analyzed, and instruction modified accordingly.

II. TEACHING AND LEARNING

FINDINGS:

- The District has implemented research-based reading and mathematics programs that are in English and Spanish and contain opportunities for teachers to differentiate instruction for ELLs, students with disabilities, and those needing additional academic support.
- The District is completing the transition from a basal reading series to one that is more responsive to ELLs, students with disabilities and struggling readers. Implementation is complete in grades one to three; it is being piloted in one grade four and a single grade five class in the 2011-12 school year.
- As teachers use the new program, they are changing from teaching reading skills to teaching reading. The review team noted teachers find themselves better able to meet the needs of students with varied abilities.
- The review team observed that the baseline of instruction in the school's bilingual classes is more rigorous than the baselines in other bilingual classes within the District.
- The programs adopted by the District come with materials in Spanish and have resources to differentiate instruction for students with disabilities and struggling readers and writers.
- In many classes, the review team observed students had challenging work that seemed relevant to their interests and personal experiences.
- In the bilingual classes, leveled-libraries in both languages and the classroom centers provide students with meaningful activities.
- Students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) are in grade four and grade five classrooms. In most classes, the small group instruction followed the curricula and the student work was differentiated, rigorous, and relevant. There was an emphasis on nonfiction reading and writing.

- The District uses programs that provide material on the same topics at different reading levels. This approach allows teachers to group students by interest level, not just by reading level.
- There also was evidence that teachers use *Readers' and Writers' Workshop* with students.
- Small group using *Good Habits Great Readers* followed the program protocols. While the teachers were working with small groups, the rest of the class was engaged in independent work. In several classes, however, the student independent work was neither rigorous nor relevant.
- For independent work, the students used computers and selected their own topics. They read passages and used the publisher's worksheets, which were not differentiated and at the basic comprehension level.
- Observations by the review team revealed that there is no consistent format for lesson design and implementation within the school.
- Some teachers seemed to have high expectations for their students, while others did not. This inconsistency was noticed as the review team viewed student work and lesson objectives and listened to teacher questioning techniques.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Teachers of students with disabilities and ELLs should be included in the *Good Habits Great Readers* school initiative so that the curricula in grades four and five are aligned across all classes.
- The reading specialist and school leader should provide support for the teachers as they learn and implement the *Good Habits Great Readers* program before full implementation. This will increase the consistency of instruction across grades and enable teachers to gain additional information about their students' reading progress.
- A variety of reading programs are used. They should be reviewed for consistency of instruction among programs, and the components should be analyzed to be sure that they represent the best practices in reading instruction.
- Due to the uniqueness of each SIFE student's needs, the District should review the elementary SIFE program to assess whether or not the current program for SIFE students in their home school best meets their needs.
- Increased attention should be given to educational needs during the student intake process; the intake team should alert the receiving school that a child is or might be a student with an interrupted formal education.
- The curriculum should be aligned within and across general, bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL), and special education classes. The same programs and assessments should be used in all three types of classrooms.

- Until the *Good Habits Great Readers* program is implemented on all grade levels, the grade four and five teachers should begin to use the “foldables” guided reading frameworks.
- All teachers should be able to write and implement a lesson with a clearly stated, P-12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)-based lesson objective that is understood by the students. The lessons should include strategies to check for student understanding during the lesson.
- Interim assessments that show evidence as to whether or not the students have achieved the objective should be part of the lesson planning and design.
- The worksheets and documents used for independent student work should be rewritten, differentiated, and require students to think critically and make connections to real life.
- For students in the identified subgroups, processing time should be built into the lesson and, for those students who need it, direct and explicit vocabulary instruction should be included. This would increase the consistency in classroom performance among the teachers and increase access to instruction for students.
- There should be alternative and more challenging ways for students to respond to the reading material, e.g., graphic organizers, outlines, paragraph writing, and presentations rather than the “fill in the blank” worksheets provided by the publisher.
- When teachers use *RazKids*, the books should be printed and students asked to complete graphic organizers and use a variety of tools to demonstrate their comprehension. Additional strategies should be used so students can extend their learning and relate it to their own lives. Priority should be given to this recommendation so that when students are working independently, they are challenged to think critically and make choices and decisions about how they respond to the material.

III. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

FINDINGS:

- Interviews conducted by the review team with parents and teachers revealed that the school leader is accessible to all members of the school community.
- Parents commented that the school leader maintains open communication with them. As needed, he ensures that parents receive daily progress reports and that communication between parents and teachers is ongoing. Parents support him in his goals to improve student achievement, and they report that their children are receiving a quality education.
- Parents reported that the school is a welcoming place for parents, and they credit the school leader and the staff for this.
- The review team observed some teachers whose classrooms exemplified outstanding instruction and student learning. In other classrooms, the levels of teacher performance varied.

- Interviews by the review team indicated that the school leader neither has the authority to make decisions about the programs for students with disabilities and ELLs nor participates in the observations and evaluations of the teachers of these groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- There is a collegial, cooperative, and supportive atmosphere in the school, and the school leader should encourage voluntary observations among colleagues so that best practices can be shared.
- If the school leader is to be held accountable for the progress of the identified subgroups, he should have the authority to supervise their teachers and allocate the staff, as he deems appropriate. He should also participate in the observations and evaluations of the teachers of these students. As the school leader sets expectations and standards for general education teachers, he should be able to do so for teachers of students with disabilities and ELLs. This District issue should be addressed in a way that supports the school leader as he works to improve student achievement for the students in the identified subgroups.
- During school leader classroom walkthroughs and observations, attention should be given to the level of expectation set by each teacher. Excellent instruction should be a primary focus of the school leader. It is especially important that expectations are uniformly high across all student groups, including students with disabilities and ELLs.
- Teachers should know that they are expected to design and implement well-constructed lessons that contain clearly stated objectives, opportunities to check for student understanding, and assessments to see if the students have achieved the objective.

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

FINDINGS:

- Throughout the year, there are regularly scheduled activities and events that encourage and support student achievement.
- The *Caught in the Act* program recognizes students for their good behavior and kind actions. This program targets behaviors outside the classroom; the paraprofessionals notice and acknowledge these positive behaviors. The school leader and teachers provide public recognition for these students, who are recognized with displays in the front lobby.
- *Super Star* assemblies are held regularly, in which selected children are publicly recognized for academic achievement and positive behavior.
- Each year, the School Improvement Team (SIT) develops literacy programs to draw attention to the importance of reading and encourage students and families to read together. They set a monthly theme and highlight books on that theme. There is a schoolwide event culminating in an evening activity with families reading together and engaging in activities related to the theme. These events are well-attended by families and teachers.

- All students participate in the District's *Young Authors and Illustrators Night*. The District recognizes one general education student, one ELL, and one special education student from each school. Each student writes or illustrates a story; school staff selects the winning submissions, which are then forwarded to the District for further review. Each student whose work is selected by the school team is recognized by the school leader with certificates, flowers, books signed by authors, medals, and gifts. This widely promoted event sparks excitement among the students.
- The school has a breakfast and lunch program so that students receive meals on site and are ready to learn when they are in class.
- The school leader sets the expectation that the teachers and paraprofessionals will work together to ensure the safest and most productive educational environment is maintained.
- The nurse, psychologist, and guidance counselor keep teachers informed about student home environments and, if needed, additional support and/or outside assistance is provided to those students and their families.

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FINDINGS:

- The District has a comprehensive professional development (PD) program where teachers and school leaders receive PD prior to and during the implementation of new programs.
- The new program facilitates instruction designed to meet individual student needs. The teachers commented that the PD on balanced literacy has enabled them to change their instructional strategies as they learn to use best practices in literacy.
- The extensive PD provided by the District encourages the teacher collaboration that is occurring at the school. The support teachers work closely with the general education teachers to find appropriate strategies to differentiate instruction for students with disabilities and ELLs who are being taught in general education classes.
- The amount and effectiveness of the District and school PD is noteworthy. Teachers commented to the review team on the relevance of the activities. They stated that what they learn is directly applicable to their work with students.
- The grade four and grade five teachers who attended the balanced-literacy training have learned to use journals and informal running records. The review team observed the teachers are beginning to use strategies that include fewer teacher-directed and more student-centered lessons. As the PD continues for them and other teachers, more guided reading and informal assessments will be used.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The teachers of students with disabilities and ELLs should attend the same balanced literacy reading and writing workshops and other PD as the general education teachers so that the curricula will be seamless for the students.
- The consultant should work with the grade four and grade five general and special education teachers as well as teachers of ELLs during common planning time and staff meetings. This work should focus on raising the level of instruction and creating challenging work for all students as well as making student work relevant. This will provide support for strategies as these teachers begin to implement aspects of the balanced literacy program.
- PD should focus on the essential elements of effective lesson design and implementation.
- The review team noted that there are master teachers at the school, and their colleagues should have an opportunity to observe and discuss their lessons. The discussion facilitator should emphasize the rigor and relevance that is apparent in the master teachers' classes and how that is developed during lesson planning.
- As the school leader observes classes, he should provide feedback on lessons.
- PD at the District and/or school level should be provided that will increase the rigor of instruction, e.g., critical thinking skills, questioning techniques, and higher-order thinking skills.
- All teachers should continue to expand their knowledge of the CCLS, with special emphasis on ELA and mathematics. This will require a close reading of the text and understanding the change in grade level mathematics instruction.
- PD should be provided regarding the new mathematics series that may be adopted; the series should be closely aligned to the six shifts in the mathematics CCLS.
- The District and school PD should continue and, if possible, be expanded.

VI. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

FINDINGS:

- The review team observed that the exits and rooms are clearly marked and done so in a manner that young children can understand. An example is the nurse's office, which is identified with a red heart that hangs over the door and is visible from either end of the hallway.
- It is clear that the custodial staff takes great pride in their work.
- The review team observed a safe, nurturing environment for students, staff, and families.
- The school ensures that all materials for students and parents are in English and Spanish.

- The school has an adequate number of textbooks and instructional and resource materials available to students.
- The District continues to increase the number of textbooks and materials available in Spanish. Leveled-libraries in Spanish are being and will continue to be purchased for use in classrooms with ELLs.
- Students with disabilities receive instructional materials in alternate formats as indicated on their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). In addition, new programs adopted by the District contain materials in alternate formats.
- The review team observed in all classrooms a sufficient number of working computers with Internet access and SMART Boards with liquid crystal display (LCD) projectors.

RECOMMENDATION:

The school should continue to establish leveled-libraries in all bilingual, ESL, and special education classrooms.

PART 3: CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The findings and recommendations noted in this 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 CCLS, Data Driven Instruction and the Annual Professional Performance Reviews for teacher effectiveness.