

NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Office of Accountability

Differentiated Accountability - School Quality Review (SQR)

SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW REPORT

BEDS Code:	42218000010052
District Name:	Syracuse City School District
School Name:	Dr. Weeks Elementary School
School Address:	710 Hawley Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13207
Principal:	Dare Dutter
Accountability Phase/Category:	Improvement (year - 1) - Comprehensive
Area of Identification:	English Language Arts - All Students; African American Students; Hispanic Students; White Students; Students with Disabilities; English Language Learners and Economically Disadvantaged Students
Dates of On-site Review:	March 20 - 22, 2012

PART 1: MISSION STATEMENT

“Our mission at Dr. Weeks Elementary School, a community of lifelong learners, is to assure that all students learn and demonstrate knowledge and defined life-long skills, making it possible for them to become positive, quality contributors in our changing society. This is accomplished by responding to the individual needs of each student, developing the whole child in a secure educational environment, along with the commitment of students, families, staff and community.”

PART 2: SCHOOL STRENGTHS

- The school is recognized by the District for fostering a full inclusion model with students with disabilities.
- Support staff, such as hall monitors, secretaries and maintenance staff, are pleasant and dedicated to the students and culture of the building.
- Teachers from special area instruction, such as physical education, art, and music, work closely with core academic area teachers to integrate aspects of core instruction into their programs.
- The school has numerous supports for students and their families, including a Community Health and Dental Clinic; the *Say Yes* after school and summer program; social workers; and *Say Yes Wrap Around Services*, such as legal services for families.

PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND UTILIZATION OF DATA

FINDINGS:

- The school shows evidence of the use of District assessments (Dibels, Acuity, Treasures). However, there is lack of evidence that formative and interim assessments are used.
- There is no evidence of any analysis of subgroups or of any differentiated interventions for identified subgroups.
- Although there is evidence of progress monitoring regularly occurring, the use of data to make changes and improvements in the instructional program is not evident.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders should ensure that the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) includes a focus on developing teacher understanding of formative and interim assessments and helping teachers build a repertoire of strategies for using assessment results. Use of assessments should be a standing topic for common planning meetings and School Leadership Team (SLT) meetings, and use of formative assessments should be evaluated through reviews of lesson plans and regular walkthroughs.
- The school leaders and teachers should explore strategies that enable them to focus on subgroup performances, using data to drive differentiated instructional decisions to support the specific needs of all identified subgroups. This effort should extend beyond academic assessments to include other critical data, such as attendance, suspensions, reasons for other class absences, behavior problems and any other factors the school considers important.
- Professional development (PD) should be provided on strategies and protocols for monitoring and analyzing the effectiveness of interventions for each student and subgroup. PD should also be provided on ways to monitor the effectiveness of different instructional strategies, with the goal of selecting and/or modifying instruction to match the needs of students. The school should ensure that student growth is monitored and that all students are on a trajectory to proficiency. Since students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged student subgroups had significantly lower scores than other subgroups, the school should ensure a focus on those subgroups. PD that enables teachers to extend their understanding beyond assessment data to include reflections on strategies for working effectively with families and an understanding of the impacts of poverty and other special circumstances on students' schooling would add significantly to the school's efforts.

II. TEACHING AND LEARNING

FINDINGS:

- Student engagement in meaningful instructional activities was limited. The team observed many lessons where instructional activities lacked challenge and did little to attract the interest of students. These same lessons did not provide students with opportunities to interact or work collaboratively, and students did not actively participate in the learning process.
- In some classrooms no teaching and learning occurred during a class period, as teachers spent time slowly passing out materials, waited for complete silence, or permitted students to carry on their own extended conversations. In other instances, teachers spent the entire period dealing ineffectively with behavioral disruptions, never getting the class to settle down.
- Many lessons the review team observed were primarily teacher-directed and did not use a range of effective, evidence-based strategies, e.g., formative assessments, manipulatives, rubrics, questioning strategies, or hands-on learning, to accommodate the differing and diverse learning needs of students.
- The review team observed minimal student self-monitoring and self-assessing of work, except in a few classrooms. There is little evidence that students are aware of learning goals during instruction. When students were asked how they could determine how well they were learning, they responded that they would ask the teacher for their grade.
- The quality of lesson plans is inconsistent. Only a few include student-friendly objectives and activities and many lack detail. There are few instances of higher order questions, student-intensive problem-solving or hands-on activities. Since teachers are expected to follow *Treasures* and *Think Math* closely, lesson plans reflect the teacher handbooks for those programs with few extensions or accommodations. School leadership does not regularly review lesson plans or provide detailed feedback during walkthroughs.
- Independent student work in learning centers consists primarily of low-level worksheets, and teachers often do not ensure that students in learning centers either understand the task to be completed or are able to work collaboratively on a challenging, yet doable task. Students therefore often do not engage in effective practice of new skills and, in some instances, repeatedly complete tasks incorrectly, reinforcing errors. Little opportunity to read extensively or to practice self-correction strategies is noted.
- The level of rigor and relevance the review team observed 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 to challenge students to think deeply and try new ideas, teacher questions are primarily low-level. Students in independent learning centers often do not have effective comprehension strategies to help them determine independently what they were reading; hands-on materials, such as science kits and resources, maps and manipulatives, are not available to help them understand underlying concepts.

- Teachers often explain assignments verbally, in great detail, rather than teaching students strategies that will enable them to process directions themselves. A great deal of text is read aloud to students rather than having students read independently. Teachers explain writing tasks in great detail, providing extensive instructions rather than modeling and scaffolding the process so students learn the task independently. 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders should identify schools and classrooms where students are engaged in rigorous learning, effectively and purposefully interacting with each other and demonstrating high academic achievement. Staff should visit these successful schools and classrooms to observe model classrooms and good practice. The school leaders should regularly monitor and robustly evaluate outcomes until high standards of learning and teaching are reached.
- School leaders should use frequent walkthroughs and other observations to ensure teachers are accountable for effective instruction for all students. Teachers who do not meet expected levels for quality instruction should be closely monitored and immediately provided support. In instances where school level support does not prove effective, the District should assist.
- School leaders should provide PD to introduce teachers to a wide range of effective instructional strategies to be used to promote greater student participation in the learning process. Teachers should be expected to implement these strategies, and school leaders should monitor their effectiveness and provide additional PD, including embedded support/modeling of strategies for teachers when necessary.
- Teachers should ensure that lesson objectives are explained to students, so they have an understanding of what they are learning. Lessons should include explicit, related, standards-based teaching points. Teachers should also model how they assess student work, and involve students in self-evaluation using rubrics so that they understand expectations for quality work. As students become more aware of using rubrics, the teacher should provide frequent opportunities for self-evaluation, peer evaluations, and critiquing of texts.
- All teachers should be expected to develop evidence-based lesson plans aligned to the New York State (NYS) P-12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) standards 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.
- Learning center work should be carefully planned, with clear goals for collaborative learning. Each student should have specific roles and be taught how to work collaboratively. Also, center tasks should be sufficiently complex so that students are solving problems or exploring concepts. 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 based on CCLS. Per Robert Marzano's Classroom Instruction That Works, these units may 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 student ability to problem solve and develop ownership of their own learning;
 - urgency in use of time; and
 - consistent use of instructional routines.
- Teachers should plan carefully for direct instruction, ensuring that they model (“I do, we do, you do”), scaffold, and provide sufficient practice so that students can work independently. Questions should be pre-planned and require analysis and interpretation.

III. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

FINDINGS:

- Although the school leader provided some evidence of conducting walkthroughs, the staff does not perceive that there is strong instructional leadership. The review team found walkthrough schedules were inconsistent and not thoughtfully planned to identify specific concerns. Teachers reported that little feedback was provided.
- Teachers felt that the current values, mission statement, and vision were not developed in a collaborative manner.
- School leaders are not regularly involved in analysis of data or in implementing schoolwide instructional strategies to increase student achievement.
- There is a lack of a collaborative planning and communication between school leaders and teaching staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders 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. School leaders 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.
- The learning community (staff, students, parents) should be provided the opportunity to develop a shared mission and vision for the school in collaboration with the SLT and school leaders. The school should find ways to build school culture and community.
- School leaders should be actively involved in the analysis and use of data to drive instructional decisions and routinely provide coaching and supervision for curriculum, assessment, and instruction. They should also set the tone for urgency in ensuring an increase in student progress and celebrating significant successes with the school staff.
- School leaders should focus on educational leadership and building effective collaboration with staff. They should also consider seeking assistance from the District in developing strategies that more effectively improve student performance.

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

FINDINGS:

- The school is housed temporarily in two separate locations while the home building is being renovated, a process that will continue for another year. This causes some difficulty in maintaining effective communication and collaboration across both staff and students' families. Teachers report many students live near the home building, far from both temporary locations so many opportunities to meet informally with parents no longer exist.
- The building currently housing grades K- 4 shows signs of age and a need for improved maintenance. It is not designed for elementary level students. Reviewers noted that many students waited up to 20 minutes to use a bathroom. It seemed at times that there were only a few bathrooms available for students to use, causing less instruction for students waiting in line.
- Grade 5 students are housed at Lincoln Middle School, about five miles away. The vice principal supervises that grade level, but it is difficult to include those teachers in collaborative school work.
- Some classrooms are not arranged to promote effective, collaborative learning and student participation.
- The use of technology was limited in observed classes. Even though all classrooms had a few computers, they were not used regularly by teachers.

- While the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program is nominally in place, many teachers do not effectively use it. Implementation of schoolwide behavior policies and the District code of conduct are inconsistent.
- Reviewers observed instances of ineffective classroom management strategies, including instances of students simply walking out of the classroom and others off task and misbehaving. In one kindergarten class, a teacher actually left a classroom without supervision during instructional time.
- School staff have expressed low expectations for the academic achievement of students, citing external factors, such as student apathy and lack of parental involvement, as the root causes for the lack of student performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders should develop a strategy to improve communication between schools, such as informal meetings and distribution of e-mails that include all staff, and ensure the SLT, committees, PD and other activities includes teachers from both sites. Also, both school leaders should regularly conduct walkthroughs at both sites to maintain connections with all teachers.
- School leaders, including the SLT, should provide PD on management and design of classroom environments and ensure that teachers can implement a variety of instructional strategies, including teaching students to work effectively in groups, in pairs, or as a whole class work as appropriate.
- School leaders should explore the use of effective technology and educational software that can be integrated into the curriculum and develop and implement a comprehensive technology plan. Teachers should receive a guided introduction to quality software programs and begin incorporating them into lesson plans.
- School leaders should assemble a team to review student disciplinary data using a schoolwide evaluation tool and align disciplinary procedures with the District code of conduct. The school leader should work closely with the District in implementing schoolwide PD on behavior strategies and supports.
- Any current teachers identified as not meeting high standards in providing instruction should be provided with the supports to improve the quality of instruction and classroom management. Simultaneously, the District should ensure that the new school staff has sufficient PD and work collaboratively with the school to develop an updated CEP, including a shared vision for the school.
- PD should be provided to enable successful implementation of clear behavioral and academic expectations for all staff and students. These expectations should be a central part of school activities and be written, monitored in the classroom, and linked to actions that focus on high expectations and academic rigor. All staff should cease citing external factors for underperformance and focus on their responsibility for all students' growth.

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FINDINGS:

- School leaders and staff do not regularly evaluate the success of their work or plan for improving performance. Therefore, the number of students reaching proficiency remains essentially the same across grade levels.
- The school staff needs District support in determining how best to develop a culture of high expectations for every student and for specific identified subgroups and identifying how to build a structure and protocols that will ensure that every student meets high expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders should investigate and identify resources on how to effectively analyze assessment information to inform teaching, including how to meet the specific needs of a single student or a whole class, and how to evaluate the impact of their work, particularly in mapping student growth. All teachers should be expected to become proficient in these strategies.
- The school should provide PD regarding learning activities that are challenging for students. The administration and SLT should ensure teachers implement rigorous instruction, with particular attention to the needs of subgroups. Lesson planning should include higher order questions and opportunities for students to share their understanding.

VI. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

FINDINGS:

- School staff report problems with bathroom facilities.
- The review team observed that teachers seldom use the limited technology available. Use of classroom computers is not considered when developing lesson plans and is not woven into English language arts and mathematics instruction.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- District staff should consult with school leaders to determine the most critical problems that need attention.
- The SLT and school leaders should work with knowledgeable District staff to identify quality educational computer programs, build in opportunities for teachers to become familiar with them, and require that they begin to incorporate them into their instruction.

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 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.