NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Office of Accountability

Differentiated Accountability – School Quality Review (SQR)

SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW REPORT

BEDS Code:	421800010027
District Name:	Syracuse City School District
School Name:	Porter Elementary School
School Address:	512 Emerson Avenue, Syracuse, NY
Principal:	Amy Evans
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:	January 18-20, 2012

PART 1: MISSION STATEMENT

The mission statement was not provided by the school or District.

PART 2: SCHOOL STRENGTHS

- Students are recognized for exhibiting positive behaviors while in school and often model expected school behavior.
- A positive school climate exists and the school is well-maintained and appealing to students, staff and the community.
- The school works to meet the needs of all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) within a flexible grouping schedule.
- Student assessment scores, e.g., Acuity, Interim Assessments, SRI data, Dibels, and *Treasures*, are posted prominently for all staff to review. Teachers meet regularly to discuss data and plan strategies to improve instruction.

PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND UTILIZATION OF DATA

FINDING:

The school performances for specific subgroups varies significantly, with performance indicators (PIs) for Black/African American, students with disabilities and English language learners scoring significantly below those of other subgroups. There is no evidence that the school has analyzed subgroup data or provided differentiated interventions for these subgroups. As with other Syracuse schools in the past, data was used to identify students who were "high Level 2's" and they were provided intensive test preparation. It often worked, at least temporarily, moving those students up to just above the cut point. The schools did not, however, make needed changes in instruction to teach those skills on an everyday basis. This resulted in a precipitous decrease in PIs when cut scores were increased, as many students scoring at or just above the old cut point scored below the new cut score.

RECOMMENDATION:

The school should ensure that they analyze subgroup performance as well as identify and address patterns of performance. Specific interventions should be developed and implemented based on the analysis, with an emphasis on subgroups performing at the lowest levels. The analysis should be used to revise lesson planning for daily instruction rather than just for test preparation. For example, teachers might identify patterns where many students had difficulty and explore the reasons why. Questions such as: "How did we teach that concept? Did any of our classes answer correctly? If so, was it taught differently? How did we test it?" can lead to changes in instructional strategies, assessment and pacing of instruction. Professional development (PD) in using data analysis to investigate instruction and assessment can lead to significant changes in the rigor of instruction and the success of students.

II. TEACHING AND LEARNING

FINDINGS:

- There is a general lack of rigor, relevance and high expectations in instruction as evidenced by frequent use of worksheets that drill basic skills and memorization and limit options for differentiated instruction within classrooms.

- The quality of lesson plans and instruction is inconsistent. While some lesson plans, especially those written by teachers trained in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), included student-friendly objectives and activities, many others were weak, with no link to learning standards/objectives. There were few instances of pre-planned higher order questions, differentiation, formative assessments or use of rubrics for evaluation, student-intensive problem-solving or hands-on activities. Often there was no logical organization for the lesson, introduction of a learning goal, engaging of student interest, building of a concept, checking for student understanding or closure activities.

- Student engagement in meaningful, engaging instructional activities was minimal in many classrooms. There were instructional activities that 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.

- Lesson plans do not specify accommodations for students with disabilities whose skills are not at grade level. Little explicit teaching or re-teaching of instructional strategies, e.g., mnemonic aids, think-aloud, and so forth, or other accommodations that would enable a student to participate more effectively in class were noted.

- There is evidence that at least some teachers are assigned to students based on seniority or some other system, as opposed to assigning the most qualified teachers to work with the highest-need students.

- Teachers use common planning time primarily for basic data analysis and daily management issues such as ensuring materials are set and meeting with parents. They have limited time to actually plan instructional strategies, to evaluate the impact of instruction or to begin long-term collaborative unit development.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Rigor and relevance should be a focus of consistent and collaborative development in implementing high quality learning units based on the New York State P-12 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) and focus on:

  - collaborative unit development, including cross-content collaboration;

  - strong student-focused learning objectives that describe specific student behaviors;

  - 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;

  - use of evidence-based instructional strategies such as modeling and scaffolding instruction, hands-on learning strategies, mediated instruction, graphic organizers, and cooperative learning strategies;

  - 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;

  - an urgency in use of time;

  - consistent use of instructional routines; and

  - high achievement for all students, with carefully planned accommodations and differentiation.

- All teachers should be required to develop evidence-based lesson plans using a template agreed upon by the school or District. The plans should emphasize in-depth development of underlying concepts and specific goals and learning activities, as well as delineating instructional strategies. Plans should also include an effective introduction and closure to the lesson as well as checks to ensure student understanding. School leaders should develop a proactive, on-going process for reviewing and improving plans and the planning process. All teachers in the school should be trained in SIOP and school leaders should monitor lesson plans and instruction through regular walkthroughs to ensure effective implementation.

- Teachers should understand the importance of student engagement as they develop lesson plans, as research indicates that students who are engaged and enthusiastic about learning learn more, are more effective learners and less likely to develop attendance problems and/or drop out of school. A carefully planned lesson can engage students' curiosity and prior knowledge so they see links between what they already know in real life, as can opportunities to actively engage in problem-solving and hands-on learning opportunities. The school should consider identifying a resource – text, webinars, or other resource – to share during professional development (PD) and use during lesson planning.

- Consultant teachers should work collaboratively with general education teachers to ensure accommodations are carefully planned ahead of each lesson and noted in lesson plans. Teachers should work collaboratively so that students receive support from both.

- The highest need students should also have access to the highest performing teachers.

- School leadership, with District support, should develop specific plans for teacher development of quality instructional units and create a balanced plan for use of common planning time during and outside of the school day. These strategies should be designed to promote in-depth conversations about quality instruction and a culture of continuous evaluation of evidence of demonstrating improvement

III. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

FINDINGS:

- School leadership lacks an effective system of communication, both internally with school staff and externally with the community and with students' families.

- The school community, including the School Leadership Team (SLT), currently is not involved in making important decisions regarding school initiatives.

- While school leaders report that they try to manage regular walkthroughs and provide some feedback on lesson plans, other responsibilities often interfere. There seems to be a different perception between teachers and school leaders. Teachers state that the length of time a school leader is in a room for a walkthrough is insufficient for meaningful review, and that they seldom receive feedback. According to staff, lesson plans were reviewed only once this year.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The SLT should build school-wide systems, including both electronic and hard copy communications that:

- provide timely, specific information about students' progress, school committees, Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO), school events and functions, and school news for families and the community;

- ensure parents receive regular communication from teachers and school leaders about individual students' behavioral and academic profiles (both positive and problematic); and

- ensure that teachers and other school staff receive and share timely and complete information regarding school issues.

- The SLT and school leaders should develop procedures to ensure that all staff, parents and community members understand and maximize their involvement in school issues, challenges and setbacks and, that for effective solutions their involvement is critical. School leaders should understand that ownership must be truly shared for others to become involved and that parent participation on the SLT is a requirement. School leaders should create community-building opportunities that are solutions-oriented, and ensure wide sharing of issues and possible solutions.

- The school leadership should establish a regular schedule for reviewing lesson plans, with those identified as weak being reviewed more frequently. Feedback should be focused and might consist, in part at least, of a checklist of expected components, e.g., objective(s), introduction, instructional strategies and checks for understanding, with specific concerns noted. Teachers identified as having difficulty with lesson planning should receive support from the Instructional Support Teacher (IST).

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

FINDINGS:

- The Academic Intervention Services (AIS) classes observed by the review team were focused on providing additional support only for ELA rather than also for mathematics, social studies or science.

- Parents, teachers and students all report problems with safety, especially on some buses and in the cafeteria, including bullying and actual fights. A need for adult supervision and training for staff supervising these activities is evident in both areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The school should work with the District to merge AIS with the tiered Response to Intervention (RtI) model, using the RtI model to determine appropriate interventions and to track student specific progress. In addition, the schools should include mathematics support in all grades, and support for social studies and science in grade 5.

- The SLT and school leaders should determine current standard operating procedures for buses and in the cafeteria, and gather information about safety issues from parents, students and any adults involved (including bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians and others) in order to determine how these problems might be resolved. Once possible solutions have been identified the school community should be included in decision making, and changes should be made that resolve the problems. The SLT might

also survey parents and students to see if other, less obvious safety/bullying issues exist.

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FINDINGS:

- Not all teachers in the building have completed SIOP training. With increasing numbers of ELLs, having all teachers proficient in SIOP is advisable.

- There are no procedures for assisting teachers who are new to the school to learn the school's common procedures or to support those who have made significant transitions from another grade level. Transitions from one school to another or from one grade one to another can require teachers to learn new strategies.

- Teachers have had little time and/or instruction in either individual or collaborative development of rigorous research-based units of instruction.

- There is little time set aside for the development of effective, collaborative lesson and unit plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- All teachers, including teachers of students with disabilities, ELLs and those assigned to special areas should participate in SIOP training and be required to demonstrate effective implementation of that protocol.

- Teachers who are new to the building, as well as teachers transitioning from one grade level to another should be provided with individualized support, as needed, to make such transitions easier.

- PD should focus on evidence-based practices for engaging students in rigorous learning including:

  - collaborative unit development, including cross-content area collaboration in developing and implementing units that meet the requirements of the CCLS;

  - writing strong student-focused learning objectives that describe specific student learning outcomes;

  - creation of pre-planned higher-order questions and questioning strategies that require in-depth student thinking;

  - use of informal assessments linked to learning objectives and on-going formative monitoring of student progress; and

  - effective classroom management strategies, including how to develop urgency in the use of instructional time.

- A significant portion of common planning time should be set aside for teachers to create high quality lessons and to evaluate the delivery of those plans. The Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) model provides opportunities for teachers to practice new instructional strategies while learning from

each other. This model would be an excellent vehicle for this work. Teachers should also identify available resources such as lessons developed by the District and by other CCLS venues, as well as other web resources for ideas. In addition to grade level planning, the school should consider the possibility of developing a schoolwide unit that would engage everyone in a common learning unit. These often are cross-curricular and hands-on, and can involve the community. Since the school has an after school *Say Yes* program, it might also be involved in the unit.

VI. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

FINDINGS:

- There are few resources available for accelerating students at the primary levels, e.g., higher level text for accelerated readers, software programs that provide acceleration, advanced mathematics games.

- District planning for technology is needed. The ELL classrooms have significantly more technology than other classes due to an ELL grant. Some I-pads, multiple computers and a SMART Board are being effectively used. The remainder of the school is lacking in technology, with the limited computers available scheduled primarily for AIS use. While the Media Center has some additional technology, it is typically scheduled for library classes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The SLT should establish a subcommittee of teachers to carefully investigate and recommend resources that would provide opportunities for extending conceptual understanding, problem-solving and thinking skills at the primary level. Resources might include a wider range of age-appropriate but more complex texts or a range of resources that would meet CCLS expectations.

- More technology is needed in the media center so that a greater number of classes can access computers for classroom instruction. The school should formalize a plan for ensuring that the media center is accessible for students at a variety of times (before, during and after-school). In addition, new technological equipment, such as I-pads and other devices should be provided for student use.

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 CCLS, Data Driven Instruction and the Annual Professional Performance Reviews for teacher effectiveness.