

NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Office of Accountability

Differentiated Accountability - SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW (SQR)

SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW REPORT

BEDS Code:	421800010003
District Name:	Syracuse City School District
School Name:	Clary Middle School
School Address:	100 Amid on Drive, Syracuse, NY 13205
Principal:	Pamela Odom-Cain
Accountability Phase/Category:	Improvement (year 1) - Comprehensive
Area of Identification:	English Language Arts - All Students; African American Students; Students with Disabilities and Economically Disadvantaged Students
Dates of On-site Review:	January 10-11, 2012

PART 1: MISSION STATEMENT

Not provided by District or School.

PART 2: SCHOOL STRENGTHS

- Staff researched single gender education last year and won Board of Education approval to begin separate gender-based student academies in the fall of 2012. The new program is fully implemented and staff, students, parents and the community are enthusiastic about the positive changes in the school. Parent and community involvement at the school has significantly increased.
- As one aspect of their improvement plan, staff analyzed the school's writing program and developed plans of action to improve attendance in the school and to revise their writing program, including changes in instruction, programs and resources. The school now has a strong schoolwide literacy initiative focused on student writing and portfolio development. Each student writes an essay in each subject (the focus for the time we visited was developing an argumentative essay), and a common rubric is used by both teachers and students.
- Schoolwide routines and procedures around the school's behavior referral system, the gender-based academies, lunch procedures, and uniforms are well-thought out and effectively implemented. Teachers take responsibility as deans for supervising the behavior referral system on a rotating basis, focusing on maintaining consistent policies. The great majority of students regularly wear school uniforms.

- School leadership, staff and community are collaborating in developing and implementing the newly instituted model of gender-based teams. The school is actively reaching out to community groups, and community organizations are providing a wide range of supports, from funding school uniforms to mentoring students.
- Teachers report that they feel supported in all aspects of their work by school leadership. School leaders are visible and accessible and have established clear lines of vertical and horizontal communication, including regular walkthroughs of approximately an hour a day.
- The school is providing additional supports for students, including:
 - A three-day review and reteaching period at the end of each quarter. Teachers review individual students' progress in the week before the end of the quarter and identify specific skills that need to be reinforced. They then assign students to small groups and provide three "reteach days" based on each student's needs.
 - A schoolwide mentoring program, with eight students assigned to each staff member. Groups meet for an hour one to two times monthly using an advisement format. Students were enthusiastic about the small group format and having the opportunity to bond with "their" teacher.

PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND UTILIZATION OF DATA

FINDINGS:

- While data analysis is used as a tool for monitoring student progress, the analysis is based primarily on student test scores; the tests tend to focus on questions at the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy rather than on conceptual understanding. There is only limited analysis of student data by student subgroups, with the exception of gender-based analyses that have been done as a part of the school's move to single-gender classes.
- The school does not yet have an effective process for analyzing and monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of programs, initiatives and strategies. The school continues to have issues with student attendance, classroom routines such as time-on-task and student-reported bullying. School level teams are, however, working to develop effective evaluation strategies to continue the change process begun this year.
- Data show that a significant number of students are at Level 2 on the State assessments, with others earning a low level 3. Students with disabilities, both those in self-contained classes and those in inclusion programs, typically score at Levels 1 and 2.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders should focus more closely on class-by-class and subgroup-by-subgroup deficiencies, in addition to whole school and grade monitoring. They also should focus more directly on assessing

underlying conceptual understanding and on evidence-based questioning strategies. This step would enable them to focus on the new Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), especially on the College and Career-Ready components. Protocols should be developed to ensure that all teachers incorporate item skills analysis and predictive results to inform their instruction. The development of student skills as they move from grade to grade should be monitored to check for vertical alignment in each content area. Further utilization of data with regards to specific subgroups should be seen in lesson plan development and instructional delivery.

- School staff, including the School Leadership Team (SLT), Instructional Support Coach (IST), the school leader and others, should identify high-priority behavioral and programmatic concerns, such as a lack of consistent classroom expectations, student attendance or behaviors. They should collect and analyze information and develop an action plan as part of the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) to address these concerns. The SLT should monitor implementation of the CEP to ensure consistent improvement and evaluate growth on an ongoing basis.
- School leadership should research instructional strategies that move all students beyond learning facts and procedures and towards strategies that develop deep conceptual understandings and focus on building higher-level skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving strategies. Because many current classroom worksheets and tests measure lower level skills, staff should revise their tests to focus on higher-level skills so that they can identify gaps more easily. As teachers begin developing CCLS instructional units, they will find frequent links to higher level skills, as well.

II. TEACHING AND LEARNING

FINDINGS:

- Lesson planning, as evidenced by team reviews of lesson plans, varies. While some lesson plans were strong, many are merely lists of activities. This lack of effective planning leads to a low level of rigor and relevance during instruction in many classes, with little access to challenging learning opportunities for many students and few opportunities for students to become involved in hands-on learning or to develop deep conceptual understandings. Only a few teachers focus on ensuring that students understand the goals of the day's instruction or that time is effectively used.
- Lesson plans do not specify any 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, or other accommodations that would enable a student to participate more effectively in class were observed.
- Many observed lessons are primarily teacher-directed and do not use a range of strategies to accommodate the differing and diverse learning needs of students.
- Differentiated learning activities are not evident during classroom instruction. Teachers seem to equate group or center work with differentiation.
- Not all teachers have strong classroom management skills and/or understanding of the essential components of instruction, such as ensuring student engagement, providing lesson closure or checking for understanding, leading to lack of student time-on-task and inappropriate student

behaviors.

- There is inconsistent monitoring of student progress on a daily/weekly basis through informal classroom monitoring, as well as minimal evidence of teachers providing specific instruction to students on self-monitoring strategies and ensuring students understand what they are doing.
- Science laboratory classroom equipment and materials are not adequate for middle level science instruction.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Rigor and relevance should be a focus of consistent and collaborative development in implementing high quality learning units based on 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 for every child. No matter their academic level;
 - 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.
- Consultant teachers should plan regularly with general education teachers to ensure accommodations are carefully planned in advance of each lesson and noted in lesson plans. Teachers should work collaboratively so that students receive support from both.

- School leaders should rigorously monitor classroom instructional practices and provide on-going, quality feedback to teachers. School leaders should ensure that teachers are held accountable for implementing strategies that address identified areas for improvement and ensure that teachers implement strategies learned through professional development (PD) into their classroom practice.
- PD is needed so that teachers understand the essential components of differentiated instruction and do not assume that group or project work equals differentiation. There should be explicit instruction that focuses on “What does it look like in the classroom?”
- School leaders should ensure appropriate classroom management and sequencing of instruction by ensuring that teachers plan the flow of lessons and include all lesson components in their plans. Teachers should ensure that students clearly understand classroom routines and expectations and should encourage them to be self-directed and personally accountable. For example, students should enter the classroom and start and complete the Do It Now (DIN) within the first few minutes of class with no reminders from the teacher. Teachers should plan checks for understanding and effective closures so that students are able to summarize the day’s lesson, the teacher is able to assess the degree to which students mastered the day’s content, and students are able to efficiently transition to the next class. Classroom rules and consequences should be discussed and posted and become routine.
- Teachers should receive PD on the informal, on-going use of formative and interim assessments that enable them to monitor student understanding on a daily basis, e.g., ticket out the door, use of individual white boards, quick checks of understanding and develop strategies for how and when to re-teach. In addition, teachers should teach students strategies and provide them with regular opportunities for guided practice that enable them to self-evaluate their own learning, e.g., instruction in using rubrics to evaluate their own work.
- School leaders should work with the District science coordinator to evaluate laboratories and develop action steps for lab renovations and purchase of lab materials.

III. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

FINDINGS:

- School leaders do not effectively ensure that all members of the school community implement all of the components of the mission and vision for school development and improvement. Not all staff consistently use common instructional planning time to ensure continuous progress monitoring of all students, such as monitoring AIS results and planning to ensure AIS is aligned with core instruction.
- Not all staff follow schoolwide standards. Some core content teachers and school leaders state that their students just cannot or will not comply with behavioral expectations for high academic performance, and some teachers do not meet leaders’ expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leadership should continue to develop their schoolwide plan to improve student achievement – both academic and social-emotional. School leaders and staff should identify the critical priorities

for improvement, articulate a clear vision and strategic plan that drives the school towards student success and clearly outlines the responsibilities of staff and leaders. The plan should include goals, expectations for all staff, action plans, and PD, and should use all resources available through the District. The implementation of the plan should be carefully monitored and its impact on student success measured.

- School leadership should reinforce schoolwide high expectations and ensure that all staff consistently implement school rules and policies. Any staff new to the building should be provided with an in-house new induction/orientation program and be provided with an informal mentor during their transition.

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

FINDINGS:

- There is a lack of schoolwide consistency regarding routines and procedures, especially within classrooms. While hallway and public area expectations are specific and known by students, and are enforced by leadership, not all staff follow through with the same expectations.
- There is a lack of emphasis on developing student ownership and responsibility for their own learning and behavior. Although there are rewards for good behavior, e.g., dances, pizza, etc. many students seem to believe that following the rules when an adult is watching is all that is required. Many students' reports of bullying and other misbehaviors, such as walking off in another direction rather than going to their class if they are not in sight of an adult, were observed.
- Many students report bullying within the school, and some indicate that misbehavior is a significant problem on buses. Students described a significant amount of bullying, especially in the hallways and in other situations where direct teacher supervision was less obvious. Much of the bullying was fairly subtle and not easily noticed unless a student complained.
- The school has one large open classroom space that serves three classes at a time and is not conducive to learning. One section has a computer lab, while the others house regular classes. The levels of noise and disruption vary significantly depending on the classes, but even in the best of situations it is difficult for students to attend to learning given the noise level.
- Classrooms are minimally equipped with instructional technology, resulting in students having limited to no opportunity to develop technological literacy skills.
- The school does not have sufficient resources to provide Academic Intervention Services (AIS) to students in all four core content areas. The school does have Math AIS and Fast Forward, as well as a unique re-teaching plan where, every ten weeks, teachers identify specific skills that students have not mastered and provide a three-day small group re-teaching sessions. In addition, the school has been an AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) school for many years, and many teachers have been trained in the beginning levels of IB (International Baccalaureate) and have built basic organizational and study skills (school planners and Cornell note-taking) into all classes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leadership should develop specific protocols around routines and procedures in classrooms to maximize time spent on instruction, and hold all staff responsible for schoolwide consistent routines, including responsibility for:
 - teaching and providing guided practice in self-monitoring behaviors,
 - monitoring student behaviors in hallways, other public areas and upon entering and exiting classrooms,
 - preparing effective lesson plans and having appropriate materials ready and organized,
 - following consistent schoolwide behavior expectations and developing effective classroom management and instructional strategies.
- The SLT, including parent representatives, should research and develop specific, age-appropriate goals and expectations for developing student ownership of behavior and learning. Students, too, should be involved in the discussion about setting goals. New York State's Student Support Services office has an extensive list of resources, and there are numerous evidence-based approaches to helping adolescents develop self-responsibility, e.g., Marzano's Handbook for Classroom Management and organizations focused on student supports, such as the National Character Education Center.
- While safety concerns cannot be entirely resolved by adult supervision, every staff member should be required to follow school expectations/routines for monitoring hallways. Beyond that, the SLT should develop an action plan that brings together community and school including students to focus on bullying and student safety concerns. This issue is currently in the news, and resources are being developed so many options for curbing bullying are available. As with the previous recommendation, New York State's Student Support Services office can provide a list of possible resources.
- If the space must be used for more than one classroom at a time, the District should provide moveable sound-buffering walls to lessen distractions. In addition, classes scheduled for this space should be carefully selected to ensure minimal disruptions. The school might also consider using the space for small group interventions or other circumstances where limited noise would be generated.
- To the extent possible, the school leader should seek District support to develop a technology plan for the school. The school leader should prioritize the implementation of the plan in order for students to master technological literacy skills. Once technology is available PD should be provided to enable successful implementation for all staff and students. School leaders should then monitor technology usage through observations and walkthroughs.
- The school leadership should monitor data on student growth in core area learning and evaluate the impact of current interventions to determine their effectiveness. Staff should also, during their 10 week reviews, identify specific at-risk students who need additional support, using their 4-tier RtI protocol, and develop individualized intervention plans that ensure those students have a strong intervention plan and that their academic and behavioral needs are met.

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FINDINGS:

- Teachers report frustration from a lack of time to work on CCLS and intensive unit development. Most Clary staff have several years of AVID and IB training and are anxious to find time to begin serious unit development.
- Staff have identified several issues that they would like to explore in order to continue the thoughtful change process begun last year when they researched single gender education, such as attendance and grading policies. These explorations would be an appropriate focus for an ongoing collaborative learning community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Unfortunately, District fiscal constraints have made extended planning times far more difficult to achieve. The District does have summer sessions for CCLS for all teachers. There is also a District committee currently developing instructional units. Teachers were able to apply for participation on that committee. There are also many web-based CCLS resources, from webinars on unit design to fully developed units that would provide teams with engaging, useful resources.
- The school and District should support professional accountability by encouraging the creation of a schoolwide professional learning community, i.e., book study, lesson study, peer observations; and providing opportunities for teachers to use some of their common planning time for study. To the extent possible, given fiscal constraints, it would help if the District could provide additional support, whether in the form of remuneration or possibly by providing opportunities for attending relevant conferences such as the National Middle Schools Association.

VI. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

FINDINGS:

- The school has limited access to technology, with only two SMART Boards in the building. They do have two computer labs and four mobile computer carts plus a few computers in classrooms that are so old they are no longer supported by the District.
- The library is the hub of the school, and is used for many activities. The librarian teaches regular classes and supports open library times for student research and book exchange. While the library has some computers, student access is limited due to other scheduled activities. The after school program has a student book club, but again not all students have adequate access.
- There is some evidence of the school needing repairs. Two bathrooms are inoperable, and the heating system is extremely noisy. As noted earlier in this report, the large instructional space is not conducive for simultaneous groups of multiple classes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The District should create and implement a District level technology plan to support individual schools in developing school - and classroom - appropriate technology. Within a broad district framework that defines specific criteria for adopting technology, the District should support schools in grant writing so that they can begin developing adequate technology for all schools.
- The school should consider options to enhance access and optimize available resources so that the media center becomes a true “center of learning” for the school. The library should be accessible for students at a variety of times, e.g., before, during, after school. More diverse technology should also be incorporated. School leaders should collaborate with technology teachers/leaders at their receiving high school and at the District level to develop a plan that will ensure students can make a seamless transition to the high school’s Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs.
- The District, in addition to their overarching renovation plan, should also implement a plan to monitor all schools regularly for routine repairs and ensure that such repairs are scheduled and completed in a timely manner.

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.

Many Clary teachers have been in the school for several years and have typically been interested in researching and trying new approaches to working with their middle level students. They have a background of implementing AVID and beginning exploration of IB, and have reached out and built bridges with their neighboring community. At this time they need to move much more aggressively from traditional fact- and algorithm-based instruction to the new CCLS focus on college and career ready skills, including critical analysis and problem solving. To do this, teachers need to become expert in instructional strategies that enable all students to develop higher level skills such as solid conceptual understandings, critical thinking and organizational strategies and problem-solving skills. They need to be able to manage this for every student, and especially for their at-risk youngsters, including students with disabilities.

We recommend also that the District support Clary in working with their feeder schools, as a comprehensive initiative that focuses on building rigor and engaging students from the early grades on will be more successful for all students.