



**CTDOE**

**QUALITY REVIEW FINAL REPORT**

## **Norwalk Public Schools**

# **Quality Review Report**

**Cranbury Elementary School**

**5 Knowalot Lane  
Norwalk  
Connecticut  
06851**

**Principal: Robin Ives  
Dates of review: September 17 – 18, 2007  
Reviewer: Jean Mackie**

**Cambridge Education (LLC)**



**Cambridge  
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## Part 1: The School Context

### Information about the school:

Cranbury is an elementary school with an enrollment of 464 students from kindergarten through grade 5. It also hosts two pre-kindergarten classes on behalf of the district. The school is located in the northern area of Norwalk and serves a culturally diverse community of students. Many students travel by bus to the school from all parts of the district.

The student population comprises 60.3 percent White students, 19.4 percent Black students, 16.6 percent Hispanic students and 3.7 percent Asian American students. The proportion of students with special education needs is approximately 9 percent, which is below both the district and state figures. The proportion of students with a non-English home language, mainly Spanish, has risen significantly over the last six years and now stands at 20 percent. Of these, just over 11 percent receive targeted English as a second language support services. Both of these figures are below those of the district but above those of the state.

Twenty-three percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price meals, which is lower than the district and state. The school has approximately 10 percent of its students who are identified as gifted and talented, which is similar to the district and above the state figure. The attendance at 96.1 percent is in line with that of the district and the state.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well:

- The strong focus on mathematics has led to significant improvements in achievement this year.
- The school analyses data well to identify areas of strength and to inform its priorities for future development. These are clearly articulated in the growth plan.
- The administration provides clear direction for the work of the school.
- The strong commitment to the personal and academic development of the students is reflected in the very positive relationships evident in the school, the good behavior and in the students' enthusiasm for learning.
- There are some good examples of teacher using questioning to challenge students to think critically about the work that they are doing.
- Parents feel welcomed into the school and provide good support for its work.

### Areas for Improvement:

- Strengthen the quality of teaching and learning by providing more regular opportunities for students to talk to each other in pairs and small groups.
- Develop further consistency in assessment practice by ensuring a common understanding of expectations between classes in the same grade and from one grade to the next.
- Ensure that the planned professional development to aid teachers in providing effective differentiated individualized support for students is monitored carefully so that its impact on achievement can be systematically evaluated.
- Further refine the school growth plan by developing supplementary plans. These should have goals and strategies to achieve them, which are specific to individual grades.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### Overall Evaluation: The school's overall performance

#### **This school meets minimum requirements.**

This is a very caring school in which students are able to develop and thrive. The dynamic leadership of the principal, along with the assistant principal, ensures that the high expectations of the students' personal and academic progress are shared by all staff. Parents and students value the safe and secure environment provided by the school and are proud to be part of its community.

Overall achievement is proficient. The school has made significant improvements in mathematics, such that results for 2006-07 are not only above those of the district but also above those of the state. This improvement has resulted from a focused analysis of data and well-targeted actions taken to improve teaching and learning. Reading results dropped from the previous year. They remained above those of the district but below those of the state. The achievement of several student subgroups improved in 2007 but overall, socio-economically disadvantaged students failed to meet the expected standard. The school is taking rigorous steps to tackle this issue.

The quality of instruction meets minimum requirements, with a number of strengths. The curriculum provides good opportunities for students to develop leadership qualities and a wide range of skills. Teachers are very effective in setting a positive climate in the classroom so that students are eager to learn. At present, however, whilst there is good practice evident, opportunities are missed to promote language skills through paired and collaborative student discussions. Assessment strategies are developing well but there remains some lack of consistency in the use of data to provide differentiated individualized learning and in expectations of students.

The students show real enjoyment in school. The relationships between the students themselves and between students and adults are exemplary. There is a strong sense of harmony amongst the students who come from a diverse range of backgrounds. The adults in the school provide excellent role models. This is reflected in the respect they show the students, who respond very positively to the high expectations that the school has of both achievement and behavior.

Leadership and management exceed minimum requirements. The principal and assistant principal work very well together to analyze data to identify strengths and areas of weakness. This information is used systematically to inform priorities for development, which are clearly articulated in the school growth plan. The improved achievement in mathematics is a good example of the impact of actions taken to raise standards. Monitoring and evaluation of classrooms has led to improved practice. The school is not complacent, however, and has already planned to strengthen teachers' skills further in assessment and differentiated instruction. The commitment to professional development is evident in the plans to provide personal growth through distributing leadership more widely throughout the school.

Parental links with the school are very strong. Parents play an active role in the life of the school and value the open door policy, which enables them to gain regular insights to their children's progress. They would, however, value more focused information about the specific curriculum that their child is following. The school is eager to ensure that parents from all backgrounds play an active role in the school and are taking appropriate steps to tackle this.

## **Criterion 1: Student achievement in the core subjects**

### **The students' achievement is at proficient level and meets minimum requirements.**

In 2005-06, the proportion of students meeting the state goal level in the Connecticut Mastery Test in reading, writing and mathematics was above that of the district and below that of the state. In 2006-07 the whole school's results in both reading and mathematics were also above those of the district. Reading results were below those of the state but the performance in mathematics was above state results. The school's focus on improving the curriculum and instruction in mathematics resulted in a significant improvement in achievement from 2006 to 2007 for all grades but particularly in grade 4. Reading results in 2007, by contrast, showed a drop across all grades from those in 2006. The school has carefully analyzed the strands within the reading program and as a result, has identified where improvement is needed. Results for 2007 in writing have remained broadly similar to those from the previous year, with an improvement shown in grade 3 and a small decline in grades 4 and 5.

Although the school as a whole has reached goal level, a subgroup of socially and economically disadvantaged students has not met the proficient standard overall. The school is fully aware of this and taking focused action to improve outcomes for these students.

The school's monitoring spreadsheets for each class track the progress of each student to ensure that progress is at least as expected, if not better. Where progress is not as good as it should be, appropriate interventions are provided. As a result, students make steady progress in most subjects as they move through the school.

The focused support and small group arrangements for students with special education needs and English language learners ensure that they also progress as well as they can. The school was particularly pleased with the progress shown by a small group of grade 5 students with special education needs in mathematics last year as a result of the targeted interventions that they had received.

The school's gifted and talented students are supported through a district program, but this does not fully align with that of the school. As a result, the intervention does not always have the impact on overall progress that is intended. Nevertheless, these students are appropriately challenged in class so that their progress is steady.

The school does not, at present, monitor achievement according to gender but data shows that the differences in outcomes for girls and boys are largely in line with those of the district. The performance of different ethnic groups is, however, closely monitored and any weaknesses tackled. The reading levels for Black students, for example, improved from 2006 to 2007 so that they now meet the expected standard.

The school has high aspirations for all of its students and is constantly seeking ways to improve their learning and achievement. It is on track to secure further increases in academic standards. The analysis of data to identify areas of the curriculum and instruction in need of improvement is thorough and leads to well-focused priorities. These are carefully articulated in the school growth plan. This would benefit from supplementary plans to provide greater detail of how planned improvements will translate into improved outcomes for students.

## **Criterion 2: The quality of instruction through teaching, learning and curriculum, and the use of data to promote learning**

### **This area of the school's work meets minimum requirements.**

The principal and assistant principal have worked proactively with the staff in recent years, to develop greater consistency and coherence to the curriculum. District guidelines are followed and have been amended and supplemented to meet the needs of the students more closely. As a result, teachers are using common terminology in both literacy and numeracy to ensure that students can more easily progress their learning as they move from one grade to the next. The school recently spent a great deal of time focusing on improving the effectiveness of the mathematics curriculum as data indicated that this was an area for improvement. The detailed planning at grade level ensured that key ideas were introduced at the appropriate level and has resulted in a mathematics curriculum with greater coherence. This led to improved significantly achievement last year. The school is concerned to ensure that changes promoted by the district this year do not have an adverse effect on the progress it has made.

Despite a similar drive to improve specific skill areas in literacy, the impact on student achievement is been less evident. The school is continuing to tackle this issue through a cross curricular approach to developing literacy skills. Implementation is at an early stage so evaluation of this action has not yet been undertaken.

Staff are very effective in promoting a positive learning environment within the class. All students are well focused and eager to learn. This is particularly impressive given the short period of time that students have been back in school. Students in kindergarten have settled in well and are already familiar with daily routines.

Teachers provide a suitable range of opportunities for individual, group and whole class work. Students say that they especially enjoy project work and group activities. The latter are well managed and enable students to share their ideas about the task in hand and to develop personal skills related to cooperative learning and team building. This was evident in a grade 3 class for example, where groups of students were working well together, discussing examples of positive acts of kindness, either observed or heard, which they had noted in school.

There are some good examples of teachers challenging their students to think critically through searching questions. In a grade 5 class, the teacher probed the students' understanding of the significant characteristics of Pedro, the main character in the historical fiction book that they were reading. The students were clearly engrossed and eager to respond to the teacher's questions.

There is a constant focus on improving language skills, which starts with the youngest children. Kindergarten students, for example, were encouraged to answer questions in full sentences so that they could practice and improve their vocabulary and speaking skills. With an increasing number of English language learners and students with special education needs in the school, this is particularly important. Practice is not fully consistent, however, as some older children were not similarly challenged to answer in full sentences. In addition, valuable opportunities are missed in whole class sessions to enable children to discuss their thoughts in pairs or small groups before responding to the teacher.

Assessment procedures are developing positively. The school has a progress monitoring spreadsheet for each class. This highlights specific characteristics of each child and the outcomes of any assessments. For example, the sheets include reading test data and baseline assessments undertaken at the beginning of the school year. In this way, teachers can check progress easily and identify those students who require additional intervention. Grade level meetings are used constructively, along with the weekly faculty meetings, to develop the system and to discuss the needs of individual students. As a result of last year's evaluation of the spreadsheet, changes have already been made to make it even more effective this year.

The data, which the teachers and school gathers is used to group students in class for focused support and challenge. This is an area for further development as the school recognizes the need to ensure that all teachers have the skills and confidence to provide effective differentiated individualized support to students. Similarly, evaluation of data has also shown that teacher expectations are not fully consistent, particularly from grade to grade and this is also being tackled.

The school provides a well-supported program of after-school activities, including sports that is much appreciated by the students. Homework is provided on a regular basis but parents feel that it is not always well matched to the needs of their children.

### **Criterion 3: Students' personal character development**

**This area of the school's work is excellent.**

The school is rightly proud of the character development of the students in its care. There is a very strong climate of mutual trust and respect between the students and between students and adults. This results in very positive relationships both in the classroom and around the building. The students behave exceptionally well and have very good attitudes towards learning. This is reflected by the way they concentrate well on their work in class.

The students value the opportunities provided to take responsibility within school. This can be through specific daily tasks in the classroom, safety monitors or the 'Cranbuddy' scheme, where older students support younger students. There is also a schedule of students who organize the morning announcements, which includes the reading of the Cranbury pledge. Opportunities are provided for students to take part in fund raising activities to support the local community. The resources and well-kept building are free from damage, reflecting the respect shown by the students for the environment in which they spend their day. The school's promotion of high moral standards results in students being able to clearly distinguish between right and wrong.

The atmosphere and relationships established within the school ensure that the rich diversity of students from a wide range of backgrounds all get on well and are mutually supportive of each other. When disagreements do arise, the students say that they are able, for the most part, to resolve them by themselves. Any more serious issues are judged to be managed effectively by the school. Students feel safe and secure and are happy to turn to adults in time of need.

Attendance and punctuality are high priorities for the school, especially as some students have to travel from the south of the district. Strong parental support and the enthusiasm of the students for school mean that attendance levels have been sustained at well above 90 percent. Punctuality is also good, with the school taking rigorous action to follow up those who are repeatedly late.

### **Criterion 4: Effective leadership and management**

**This area of the school's work exceeds minimum requirements.**

The principal, ably supported by the assistant principal, provides strong leadership and direction for the work of the school. Both are totally committed to the development of well-rounded individuals who are fully prepared for their transition to middle school by the time they complete their 5th grade. Expectations of both personal and academic development are high. There is a common sense of purpose among the staff who all share this commitment and work relentlessly to achieve it.

The administration systematically analyzes data to identify success and areas where improvements are required. This information is shared with the staff so that there is a common understanding of what has worked well and where weaknesses remain. It is also used carefully to inform the priorities in the school

growth plan, which then underpins the work of the school in a well-focused way. The planned developments in mathematics, for example, resulted in a more coherent curriculum across the school. Clearly focused professional development took place, improving the overall teaching and learning in the subject.

Grade level meetings and weekly faculty meetings provide well-structured opportunities for review and reflection. Teachers value these sessions and regularly take part in informal discussions to share practice and ideas. The administration is rightly keen to strengthen this process through distributing leadership to grade level. This will require plans to be developed, which underpin those of the whole school but are focused specifically on the needs of students in each grade. The enthusiasm and highly professional level of debate that takes place in the school about teaching and learning reflect the strong capacity of the administration and faculty to secure further change.

Regular monitoring of data and classroom observations to evaluate the quality of teaching are undertaken. This process contributes well to improvements in practice. The principal and assistant principal are increasingly focusing on how the teaching is impacting on learning and encouraging staff to reflect in this way too. This is especially so with regard to the success or otherwise of interventions with targeted students. For example, those students identified, as not meeting expected standards receive particular attention and their progress is carefully tracked to ensure that they benefit fully from the additional support provided.

The reduction in non-certified adult support in the classroom means that teachers are increasingly responsible for planning individualized, differentiated work for the full range of students in their classes. The administration recognize through their analyses, that skill levels amongst the staff require further development in this area. Consequently, professional development is planned for this.

Some of the support from the district has been much valued by the school. The support for the mathematics development and the ongoing input to improve literacy, for example, have been helpful to the school in implementing priorities to improve achievement. Classroom visits undertaken jointly by the district and the school, have helped the school to reflect on practice but have not resulted in a clear enough evaluation of what is working well and where improvements are required. The view is that there has been a lack of clear leadership and direction from the district, resulting in rapid changes in policy, which have hindered the school in implementing its own priorities for improvement.

## **Criterion 5: Partnerships with parents and community**

**This area of the school's work exceeds minimum requirements.**

The school's warm, caring climate not only ensures that students feel safe and secure but that it is also welcoming and inclusive of all parents. Parents very much value the open door policy and the strong sense of community promoted by the school. Parent teacher conferences, 'open house' meetings and informal contacts with teachers all provide valuable links which support families in their efforts to contribute to the students' learning. Report cards also provide regular feedback on the progress made by each child. Parents and students value these and find them helpful. Some parents feel that they would, however, like more information specifically related to the curriculum experienced by their own children.

The monthly newsletter is a vibrant document, which provides extensive information about the work of the school, including important dates and events. There is a very active parent teacher organization which contributes well to the school, both in its support for the newsletter and especially in its fund raising work. This has led to the purchase, for example, of additional computers for the school. Parents have also played a key role in establishing the school's website. Some technical difficulties have hampered the full use of the computers but are being actively addressed.

The school is rightly proud of its relationships with its families and the significant contributions made by them to ensure that all children benefit from the strong partnership between staff and parents. The diversity of the community is embraced warmly. The school is, however, currently working hard to ensure that it reaches out to all parents so that families from all backgrounds are fully represented and active in developing the school further.