



**CTDOE**

**QUALITY REVIEW FINAL REPORT**

**Norwalk Public Schools**

# **Quality Review Report**

**Jefferson Science Magnet School**

**75 Van Buren Avenue  
Norwalk  
Connecticut  
06850**

**Principal: John Reynolds**

**Dates of review: September 20 – 21, 2007**

**Reviewer: Clive Parsons**

**Cambridge Education (LLC)**



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## Part 1: The School Context

### Information about the school:

Jefferson School has approximately 500 students in grades kindergarten through to 5. It is in the second year of transition into a science magnet. Nearly half of the students are Hispanic and almost one quarter are Black. About 20 percent are White students and approximately 8 percent are Asian American students. The total proportion of minority students is well above that of the district as a whole.

In 2005-06, approximately 60 percent of students had a home language that was not English. This was more than 20 percent higher than for the district and over 40 percent, or nearly five times, higher than the state. While the state figure remained level between 2001 and 2006, the proportion of such students at Jefferson School increased by over 15 percent. Only one quarter of students, however, received bilingual or English as a second language services. This figure is 50 percent higher than for the district and three times higher than for the state.

The proportion of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, at 60 percent in 2005-06, is well above that of the district and over twice as high as the state. The school has a relatively transient student population. Less than 80 percent of students, excluding those in the entry grade, were at the school last year. The figure for the district is 90 percent. Far fewer kindergarten students attended preschool, nursery school or Headstart than in the district or in the state. At approximately 6 percent, the proportion of students with special education needs is just over half that in the district and the state. Student attendance is good and in 2005 it stood at 97.8 percent, above that of the district and of the state.

New modular spaces have been provided in response to growing student numbers. These are used to house grades 4 and 5.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well:

- The principal, ably supported by the assistant principal, sets a clear direction for the further development of the school and has the trust of the school and its community in achieving their shared vision.
- The school has, through the systems and structures put in place, established a climate that enables students to make very good personal growth and in which they feel safe and secure.
- The principal has established the necessary structures to provide the faculty with the collaborative time to plan, review data and evaluate student work. He has also provided teachers with many tools, including smart boards, which support and develop their instructional practices.
- Students respond very well to the opportunities offered to them so that they behave well and develop very positive relationships with other students and with adults.
- Good progress has been made in developing an identity as a magnet school for science, implementing a broad science program that students find stimulating and rewarding, and developing effective partnerships with external bodies.
- The faculty works consistently well together, cooperatively and collegially, with the best interest of students at heart. This is a significant factor in establishing the positive climate and relationships evident throughout the school.

### Areas for Improvement:

- Use the information gathered through administrator walkthroughs to provide feedback to the faculty on what is working well, and to raise school-wide questions concerning best practice and next steps in raising the impact on student learning to the next level.
- Build on the effective discussion occurring within grade level teams by:
  - developing a vertical perspective on the curriculum to enable teachers to see where their work leads students to and from what it is based;
  - providing teachers with greater opportunity to visit other classrooms to compare and contrast their practice and the impact on student learning and progress;
  - continuing to identify external instructional expertise that will support teachers in making next steps through modeling strategies proven successful in similar schools.
- Evaluate the available student achievement data to identify specifically what has worked well. Use this data to identify what has contributed to this success, including the effectiveness of intervention and support programs.
- In order to evaluate student understanding and establish expectations for following lessons, ensure that teachers are consistently clear about the primary objective for lessons, that they review progress towards them as the lesson proceeds and at its end.

## Part 3: Main Findings

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

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

Most students make at least satisfactory progress during their time in the school. Test outcomes, however, are below those of the District and the State and so student achievement requires improvement. Nevertheless, the school is enabling more students in some groups, especially economically disadvantaged and Hispanic students, to reach proficiency in mathematics and reading than is usually found in either the District or State.

The principal has established the underlying components on which to build greater academic success. The assistant principal ably supports him and leadership and management are effective. The students make very good progress in their personal development, supported by the school's 'Tribes' process. The school's climate and culture are very supportive and nurturing. Relationships are very good, so that students behave well and engage willingly. They cooperate fully with teachers and other students when working in small literacy groups or on science activities, for example. Students value the support that they receive from adults in the school.

Modifications to programs and classrooms have been made in response to test data and direct observation of the school's effectiveness. The school has introduced new literacy and mathematics programs. Major investment, both in terms of time and resources, has been put in to the science curriculum. These are showing positive returns in terms of student interest and motivation and some early improvements in their knowledge and understanding. However, the administration does not always feed their knowledge of current practice most effectively into improving classroom experiences for students.

Teachers have much time to plan and work collaboratively. They do so well and the impact of this is evident in the consistency between the teaching in their classrooms. Teachers have increasing access to data to help them plan. Nevertheless, opportunities remain for them to use assessment information to plan learning objectives more specifically and to measure success against them with greater accuracy. Data is also used to identify issues and concerns, although less often to identify best practice and the reasons for it. There are insufficient opportunities for teachers to visit other classrooms in this same pursuit. There are good examples of teachers using technology effectively to support learning. Classroom practice is sufficiently strong to enable students to make secure progress.

Links with the local community effectively support learning. Strong partnerships are especially evident in the school's work as a science magnet. Parents are welcomed and provided with effective support and guidance to help them support their children's learning.

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

#### **The students' achievement is at basic level and needs improvement.**

Students make at least satisfactory progress during their time in the school. However, test results remain below those of the District and the State. Consequently, student achievement is in need of improvement. However, the performance of some groups of students is above that of equivalent students in the District and in the State.

The principal has recognized that, especially given the transient nature of many students, cohort data is of limited value when the school attempts to evaluate the impact of its actions and programs. Consequently, care is taken to measure the academic growth of individual students over time. This shows consistent growth for the student population overall.

There were substantial improvements in the 2007 State tests for writing. These were as a direct result of actions the school had taken, both in strengthening the curriculum and in better preparing students for the tests. The same improvements were not evident in reading and mathematics. However, overall results in mathematics were equivalent to those across the District, but below those of the State. Results for Hispanic students were above those for the District and for the State, as were those for economically disadvantaged students.

In reading, overall 2007 test results were below those for the District and for the State. Again, however, economically disadvantaged students performed above their peers in the District and the State. The performance of Hispanic students was broadly equivalent to Hispanic students in the District as a whole, but above that in the State.

The school sets suitably challenging benchmarks for its lowest performing students, which it is on track to achieve. Targeted action is being taken to improve the performance of current grade 5 students in mathematics and all tested grades in reading, especially the comprehension strands. Students with special education needs and English language learners make satisfactory progress overall, although as in the school overall, outcomes are stronger in mathematics than in reading. The principal is concerned to ensure that teachers also provide higher performing students with a suitable challenge in classrooms, as well as in the broader activities within the school. Consequently, they too make satisfactory progress during their time in school.

## **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 school has seen positive outcomes in writing from a newly adopted program, although this has not yet fed through into test results in reading. The school has created a language arts team to strengthen this aspect of its work. Reading pacing guides, aligned with curriculum goals, have been devised. A standards based mathematics program has also been introduced this year, following liaison with another local school with a similarly diverse student population. It is too early to determine quantifiable gains from these initiatives, but they are being implemented consistently and producing some early indications of success.

Good progress has been made in developing as a magnet school for science. A broad science program has been introduced which students find stimulating and rewarding. This is extending the students' experiences beyond the classroom and providing many opportunities for hands-on and collaborative work. The students' enthusiastic responses also provide an exciting avenue for supporting literacy and mathematical skills in a broader, applied context. Sometimes, however, teachers are trying to cover too many objectives at one time, encompassing both science and literacy. This is leading to a lack of focus and dilution of the rigor with which teachers sometimes pursue specific objectives.

The principal provides many good opportunities for teachers to work and plan together, with a focus on looking at assessment information and student outcomes. The faculty works well together in response, with the best interest of students at heart. This has been a significant factor in establishing the positive climate and relationships evident throughout the school. This collaboration is also impacting positively on the consistency of much classroom practice and an increasing focus on student achievement and best practice. The previous year's test data for each student has been presented to grade 4 and 5 teachers to aid continuity for students. Receiving teachers have also shared samples of students' writing. However,

there have been insufficient opportunities for teachers to explore curriculum progression vertically, through the grades.

Teachers routinely assess student progress through a variety of formal and informal means. This includes identifying students who require additional support to grasp key knowledge, understanding and skills. Sometimes this support is through modifications to lessons, with scaffolding or differentiation of work and activities. On other occasions, additional adults work with individuals or small groups of students. There remains scope, however, to strengthen the use of data to better match challenge to the individual needs of students. In recognizing this, the principal has highlighted the continuing need for professional development on strategies that most successfully meet the needs of the student body at Jefferson. This includes supporting second language acquisition and students with special education needs. Effective pre-referral systems result in more timely intervention and fewer students identified for special education.

There are good examples of teachers using strategies that effectively support learning for all students. Often these involve visual as well as verbal stimuli, sometimes using real materials. For example, a teacher of grade 2 used colored strips of paper in cups to represent students' favorite fruit juices. Students were then required to make observations and draw conclusions from the physical graph produced from their cups. The highly visual demonstration enabled all students to see clearly, to interpret and to engage effectively in the learning process. In addition, the teacher required the students to answer questions in an evaluative way, in full sentences, thereby strengthening language skills too. Teachers are also using technology effectively, as in grade 5 mathematics classes, to engage students and to provide for interactive and visual inputs.

Students engage well in class. There is little evidence of teachers needing to employ behavior management strategies in class. Students are aware of school and classroom expectations and respond accordingly. Nevertheless, the school works hard to reinforce and maintain this very positive position. There is consistent school-wide implementation of the Tribes process, aimed at improving school and classroom climate, to support this.

The move to becoming a science magnet school has boosted the opportunities for students to go off site and engage in meaningful study in a broader context. Partnership with an external organization provides a fee-paying after school program for some students. Consequently, the school is unable to provide a more academic program to address identified student needs.

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

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

The school has, through the systems and structures put in place, established a climate that enables students to make excellent personal growth and in which students feel very safe and secure.

Students behave very well, both in classrooms and around the school. They have very positive attitudes to learning. They work responsibly and cooperate well in pairs or small groups. They develop positive relationships with each other and with adults around the school. Students are appreciative of the support that they get from their teachers, both academically and personally. They work in an environment free from oppressive behaviors, but are clear that they know an adult in the school to whom they would turn should the need arise. The Tribes process supports the very positive climate, with monthly celebrations within the school.

Many students are able to show initiative, organize themselves and their working groups well and take appropriate responsibility for their own learning. This is increasingly evident as students move up the grades, demonstrating the positive impact of the school. Nevertheless, this remains a constant focus for the school, as many students on entry lack these key skills and require much support in acquiring them.

The students respond very well to the school's promotion of good attendance and time keeping. Nevertheless, effective systems are in place to support those families who do have problems getting to school on time. Attendance is good, being above the average for elementary schools in the District and the State as a whole. The students also respond well to the academic challenges provided by the school, for example they make a good effort to complete their homework well.

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

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

The principal has an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. He has set a clear direction for its further development and has the trust of the school and its community in achieving their shared vision. The assistant principal ably supports him, and together they make a strong partnership to drive the school forward. The school's aims and values are very explicit throughout its work and are clearly visible in the climate and culture achieved. Consequently, the essential building blocks for a successful school are in place. The focus now is on ensuring that the academic focus is as strongly successful as the caring aspects of the school.

The school uses data to increasingly good effect to evaluate the impact of the actions and strategies employed. This usually focuses on shortcomings in the school's effectiveness and the achievement gaps that need to be eliminated. Less attention is given to identifying what has worked well and the precise reasons for this, so that the most effective practice can be spread more widely. Teachers have test data for their incoming classes at strand level where it is available. Grade team meetings regularly explore data, draw conclusions, and identify consequences from it. As a result, the school has made curriculum modifications to achieve higher student outcomes with some success, such as in writing.

The principal and assistant principal also gather much evidence about the effectiveness of the school through the time that they spend in classrooms on a daily basis. At the moment this information is not systematically shared with the faculty to celebrate success, explore issues and to raise questions about what has been observed. Leadership is being dispersed through the school and grade teams tend to have a more experienced teacher who provides support and guidance to their colleagues. The principal has also recognized the potential of supporting teachers in visiting other classrooms as part of a differentiated professional development program.

There is good capacity within the school to sustain the developments put in place and to move the school forward. The principal has reached out to other schools, in the implementation of a new mathematics program for example. However, there is insufficient external expertise available to support teachers in taking their instructional practice to the next level, especially through modeling strategies proven successful in similar schools.

The staff believe that there is no recognition from the District that the diversity of the student population at Jefferson brings additional challenges in meeting their academic as well as personal needs. Consequently, the perceived 'one size fits all' approach to support is not valued. The impact of the support and guidance provided is therefore not as strong as it should be.

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

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

The school does a good job in welcoming parents to the school and engaging them as partners. The strongly held belief is that the school motto 'we help each other' is true of the whole community. This belief is evident in practice. Parents have easy access to the administration and teachers at drop off and

pick up times, as well as at parent teacher meetings. Attendance at conferences is reasonably good. However, many families find it very difficult to engage effectively with the school to support students' academic work at home. The parent teacher organization is small, but dedicated.

The diversity of the community is respected well. The school provides parent literacy workshops in both English and Spanish. Important communications are translated into Spanish to ensure that they are accessible. The school keeps parents well informed about the progress of their child and the broader activities of the school. The school's well-presented website provides an alternative route for parents to follow for information about activities and events.

The school has a good number of external partners, strengthened through the move to a science magnet. Partners include The Maritime Aquarium and Stepping Stones Museum. These support student achievement well by providing rich and purposeful experiences and practical sessions. Other partnerships, such as mentors, provide effective support for individual students. There has been effective liaison with another local school on the mathematics program, although generally, dialogue with schools facing similar challenges has been quite limited.