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QUALITY REVIEW FINAL REPORT

Norwalk Public Schools

Quality Review Report

Tracey Elementary School

**20 Camp Street
Norwalk
Connecticut
06851**

Principal: Paul Krasnavage

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Reviewer: Peter Lewis

Cambridge Education (LLC)



Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Background information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main findings

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school:

Tracey Elementary School is located in Norwalk, Connecticut. It serves some 420 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The student population is ethnically diverse. A growing proportion, at 32 percent has a Hispanic heritage, 27 percent are Black, and just over 34 percent are White. There are a small number of Asian American students. The proportion of students with a non-English home language has increased considerably over time to nearly 40 percent, which is above district, and considerably above state averages. The percentage receiving English language learner support in the school has grown to around 17 percent, which is also above district and state levels.

The school has a higher proportion of students with special education needs than is found in local schools and slightly higher than the average across the state. The percentage of students who are eligible for free school lunches, at just under 40, is higher than district and state averages.

The students' attendance, at just under 97 percent, is broadly in line with the average for district and state schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well:

- The principal has been successful in building a highly committed leadership team who share his vision of high expectations and 'No excuses', which are well modeled by senior staff.
- The school is a calm, safe and very well cared-for environment in which learning can take place and in which students know that they are cared for by adults. Students trust adults sufficiently to seek their help in academic or personal issues.
- The decline in student achievement has focused the whole school on the need to identify strategies for securing improvement. Examples of good and very good teaching are beginning to be used in setting the standard for expected practice.
- Parents appreciate the commitment and accessibility demonstrated by staff at all levels.

Areas for Improvement:

- Improve formal and informal monitoring activities to focus more on the evaluation of the impact of specific elements of teaching and the curriculum upon learning.
- Use information from monitoring and from the improved analysis of data to inform the development of a precise plan for school improvement. Ensure this planning includes timeframes for completion and clearly measurable objectives, to help in assessing progress towards established goals so that adjustments are made where necessary.
- Ensure that there is a clear understanding amongst all staff of what is expected of teachers and students in lessons across subjects, for example, the 3-part lesson and workshop model.
- Through the improved collection, interpretation and communication of data ensure that teachers and students have a clear understanding of their current attainment, particularly in reading, writing, mathematics and science, and that they understand their next learning steps.
- Sharpen assessment and lesson planning in all subjects so that what is to be learned by students, particularly the higher achievers is challenging, clearly identified, and supported by activities that are planned according to students' needs, prior attainment and potential.
- Improve the consistency and effectiveness with which teachers use the skills of classroom aides in supporting and assessing learning.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The school's overall performance

This school needs improvement.

The school has begun to make changes to respond to shortcomings in student attainment over the last two years. However, the school is inconsistent in applying changes that have been introduced and, as a result, improvement in students' learning is too slow. The assistant principal supports the principal well in leading development. The school is starting to use data to identify students who are in greatest need of improvement more effectively. The school is introducing new curricula and strategies of improve instruction. However, expectations are not set down clearly, particularly in relation to expected classroom practice and the degree to which teachers plan work that matches student's needs. School leaders acknowledge that more could be done.

While the school compares well with others in the district, its performance remains lower in comparison with schools across the state. The school failed to reach its adequate yearly progress targets in 2006-2007. This is primarily due to dips in the performance of its Hispanic, Black and economically disadvantaged students. In contrast, although not reported in the state assessment data, students with special education needs and those with English as a second language progressed well in relation to the targets that were set for them, according to school assessment data. This disparity is partly due to differences in the degree to which individual learning needs are considered. These match well for the latter groups of students while other students too often undertake the same tasks regardless of their abilities. This has a particular impact on higher attaining students who frequently find work too easy and often have to wait for extension materials.

The school has introduced curriculum and pacing guides. This is a good start in establishing greater consistency. Together with developments in the mathematics and English curriculum, these have the potential to ensure continuity and a developing experience for students as they move through the school. Although the school tries to maintain a broad curriculum, delays in receiving appropriate resources from the district to support social studies and science have limited the impact of this. At the same time, the school misses opportunities to build specific links across subjects into the curriculum maps.

The principal and assistant principal have a strong commitment to securing improvement. The majority of staff shares their view that the school's recent results are "unacceptable". Despite this, and the school's promotion of data and initiatives such as the workshop model of instruction, leaders recognize that progress in securing improvement has been too slow. Variations in the effectiveness of teaching remain. This is partly because there is no clear agreement as to the specific features that are expected. However, the school is now looking at ways of establishing greater consistency and setting expectations more strongly in, for example, the use of assessment in planning lessons that meet the needs of all students.

While planning for school improvement follows the district model, there are weaknesses that make it difficult for the school to track the impact of developments. Goals are set for student attainment. However, the school does not derive these from the assessment of students' potential, which means that the school is uncertain of the numbers of students who will succeed. Although the school has implemented changes to the curriculum, these were not planned for at school level. In the same way, school improvement plans fail to include an indication of the expected timescale for change, or of its characteristics. This makes it difficult to ensure that the school is achieving its goals. Nonetheless, the principal and other school leaders do have an appropriate vision of what they want to achieve, and acknowledge the need to specify this with greater clarity.

Criterion 1: Student achievement in the core subjects

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

The school's results in the Connecticut Mastery Tests for 2005/06 demonstrated that it had met whole school state targets in reading and mathematics. The achievement of Black students and those with economic disadvantage was lower than that seen across the school. Nonetheless, they met the state target in mathematics and reached Safe Harbor in reading. In 2006/07 the school failed to achieve adequate yearly progress status. In both years the school's results were below state averages.

Although, in 2007 overall targets were met in reading and mathematics, the performance of key subgroups declined with the result that Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged groups did not meet the required targets in reading. However, these results, compared favorably with schools across the district in mathematics. In reading, the performance of Black students was significantly below that achieved by schools across the district. The school has begun to look at this issue in detail. In both the most recent years, the school met its targets in writing, having demonstrated annual improvement.

The school is making increasing use of its data analysis in seeking the improvements to which it is committed. The school is beginning to look more closely at differences in teaching and the consistency of implementation of expected teaching strategies. The analysis of student performance in relation to their prior results has enabled the school to begin to identify patterns between cohorts. At present, the school makes too little use of this information in setting appropriate targets for students that are based on earlier attainment. As a result, set improvement goals in the school's development plans are both generic, and not set against a clear assessment of what individual students are projected to achieve. In contrast, the strong focus placed by the school on identifying its lowest attaining students has led to modifications in the work provided for them. This, in turn has led to an increase in the progress made by, for example, students with special education needs.

The school has recognized that there are variations in student performance between subjects and across grades. In particular, the results achieved by students in grade 3 were particularly low, although the school's own assessments indicate recent improvement. Students with special education needs benefit from clear planning and the introduction of collaborative teaching. As a result, they make good gains in their learning in terms of the targets set on their individualized education plans. Although planning is not as precise, very detailed review procedures provide good assessment information for English language learner students. The comparatively small numbers of students in each of these groups means that their results are not reported. This hampers the school in tracking the gains that are made, although in house assessments are used well in tracking the effectiveness of teaching and curriculum programs. In contrast, the gains made by higher attaining students are not sufficiently tracked. This, combined with inconsistencies in teaching, means that they frequently undertake the same tasks as other students and too often fail to reach their potential.

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 needs improvement.

The school is committed to securing improvement. In line with district initiatives, the school has introduced new curricula in mathematics, reading and writing. These have begun to make a positive impact on the clarity of teachers' planning and on the consistency of approach. Alongside these, teachers value the development of curriculum maps and pacing guides. Monitoring shows that this has brought a degree of clarity to planning within grades. Joint planning time and professional development have begun to build teachers' confidence in making use of new materials and approaches. The 'workshop model' of instruction, for example, is becoming more established as a result of the emphasis that has been placed

on its development although the school recognizes that there remain too many inconsistencies in the degree to which teachers plan work that is appropriate to their students' needs. One factor that influences this is the practice of recording the schedule for each day in each class. This was introduced to enable greater clarity and consistency in teachers' planning to cover curriculum needs and, in this, the school has been successful. Students know, as a result, what they will be doing. However, although some teachers let students know what they will be learning, few students are aware of why they are undertaking particular activities. Although there are exceptions, discussion is often limited to question and answer and seldom probes students' understanding sufficiently well to promote better learning

The school has chosen to take up the Growing with Math program, one of two new mathematics programs the district promotes. In this, as with the introduction of readers' and writers' workshops, the school acknowledges that the time available for focused professional development is less than is needed to ensure a good pace in the introduction of new styles and initiatives. Nonetheless, there are examples of the strategies being used well through the school, with lessons in which students are actively engaged in collaboration with their peers or in conferencing with their teachers.

Across the school, students behave well and concentrate well on tasks that have been set. However, the degree to which they are able to become actively involved in learning restricts the opportunities for active learning or investigation. In the best lessons, particularly in reading and in classes where co-teaching is established, good discussion and focused strategies of intervention have a positive impact on students' interest and learning. In these classes, classroom aides take an active role in working with students and are fully aware of the teacher's objectives for the lesson. In general, however, students' different learning styles are seldom taken into consideration so that all in the class will undertake the same tasks. This has a negative impact on learning, particularly affects higher attaining students.

Despite the fact that the school began to introduce the workshop model of lesson organization six years ago, this has yet to be fully embedded, particularly in mathematics and content area teaching. Part of the reason for this lack of pace lies in the reluctance of school leaders to identify expected practice and to ensure, through focused training, modeling, and guidance, that expectations are followed.

The school is increasingly focusing on data in regular grade meetings, although teachers feel that the greatest use of grade discussion is in looking at what has worked in lessons, and at successful strategies they use. Teachers' commitment to their students is high and, although there are too few focused inter-visitations, there is a clear willingness among teachers to learn from one another. Teachers gain an appropriate view of strengths and weaknesses in students' learning through interim and end of unit testing. This is considerably enhanced, in those classes and subjects where it takes place, by the use of one to one conferencing between teachers and students. In general, however, assessment is retrospective and, together with the lack of clear targets for achievement set for students at the beginning of the year, hampers the school in understanding the progress that has been made by individuals or groups.

Although the school, rightly, places a strong emphasis on improving its effectiveness in reading, writing, and mathematics, it also has a belief in providing a curriculum which is broadened through opportunities in sciences, sport and the arts. While curriculum calendars have been put in place, few links are planned across subjects. As a result, teachers plan different subjects in isolation and opportunities are missed to use skills acquired in one subject to boost learning in another.

Criterion 3: Students' personal character development

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

The school has worked hard to build a community characterized by mutual respect and clear expectations. That it has achieved considerable success in this is seen in the calm way in which students move around the school, as well as in the civilized, courteous and safe atmosphere in the lunchroom and

outside at recess. Suspensions and referrals have been reduced, although both students and parents refer to a small number of incidents that unsettle them. The principal and assistant principal have set out very clearly to staff what is expected and, as a result; expectations of behavior management are generally consistent. Further support is provided by guidance staff who have the trust of students who say that they know who to turn to should they experience difficulties and that these are readily resolved. The school acknowledges that more could be made of opportunities to communicate directly with staff and students, and is considering ways in which this might be undertaken.

Although there are occasional exceptions, student behavior is good. Their self-confidence is developed well and they say that they enjoy being part of the school. In lessons, students concentrate well, although their contribution is too often limited and some say that there are too many occasions when they find the work that they are given too easy. However, in those lessons where a lack of challenge was present, particularly for higher attaining students, behavior was never less than satisfactory. In those lessons where high expectations are set through probing discussion or tasks which matched students' abilities, they responded well and, in the majority of cases, used more complex language than is the case in other, more mundane lessons. The school has good systems for monitoring attendance which, as a result, remains above district averages.

There are few opportunities for students to develop their initiative in lessons, as investigative activities are limited. Although older students, for example, respond well to the expectation that they will move around the school in a sensible way, there are examples of younger students being led by their teacher walking backwards in front of them. This practice provides neither expectation nor the potential for development. Although some thought has been given to the establishment of a school council, one has yet to be established. As yet, the school has no other forum, such as surveys or interviews, by which the students' opinion can be heard.

Criterion 4: Effective leadership and management

This area of the school's work needs improvement.

The principal, assistant principal and literacy specialist have high expectations of themselves, their staff and their students. Together, they have begun to make good use of student assessment data coupled with monitoring activities to understand what is working well and where improvement is required. A good start has been made in translating the principal's vision into practice through, for example, instructional expectations issued to staff at the start of this year. Planned monitoring has the potential to ensure that these are seen in practice but the school accepts that even greater clarity is required. In lessons and discussion, for example, teachers describe different interpretations of the features that characterize differentiated instruction. At the same time, weaknesses in assessment and in guidance on how it should be used lead to teachers predominantly planning activities for all students, rather than in relation to their needs and abilities. As a result, students often fail to make the progress of which they are capable.

While teachers describe leaders as being highly visible through the school, uncertainty remains as to the outcomes of formal and informal observations. Some teachers describe their desire for clearer feedback, while others use good quality discussion with classroom aides to help them gain an objective view as to the effectiveness of lessons. In line with district policy, the school regards classroom walkthroughs as being developmental rather than judgmental. This has led to a lack of real evaluation of the impact of teaching on student learning. In particular, there is a lack of synthesis of the information gathered that is then communicated to teachers. The principal acknowledges this. In response, he and the assistant principal have begun to develop strategies by which information gathered from all monitoring activities will be analyzed and key points shared with staff. In developing teachers' confidence in structuring mini lessons and in conferencing, for example, appropriate guidance has been produced and given to staff. Although this includes the expectation that teachers will 'explicitly state what they will be teaching', there remains too little consistency in the degree to which this occurs across classes. At the same time, the

focus on what will be taught, rather than what will be learned leads to the assumption that successful lessons are a product of following a plan, rather than planning for student's individual needs.

The school follows the district format for improvement planning well, with targets set for improving test scores, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. The school makes appropriate use of this in focusing assessment and action upon the needs of its lowest attaining students. While this is achieving some success, the absence of identification of specific improvements that are required in teaching and to the curriculum hamper the school in evaluating where change is making a difference, and where modifications may be necessary. At the same time, the absence of timescales within which change will take place or success criteria by which progress towards change can be measured has the effect of slowing improvement.

Instructional specialists from the district are valued by the school, which sees their input to curriculum and professional development as crucial in helping it to move forward. These staff provide good support in the implementation of mathematics and English programs. The school receives similar support in the development of the social studies and science curricula, although the provision of appropriate resources to support teachers in their planning is lagging behind.

Senior staff share the principal's vision for the school's development and have made a good start in helping teachers to understand new curriculum programs and make better use of students' achievement data. However, the strength of purpose, which the principal strongly articulates, is not set out as a clear school vision, plan or set of expectations. The staff are unclear about where the school is going, what needs to change in order for it to reach its goals and their part in securing improvement. Discussions at senior level are generally well focused but the school's ability to provide support to those teachers who most need it is limited. The district's lack of evaluation of the school's effectiveness exacerbates the situation. Centrally provided professional development too frequently targets the introduction of initiatives across the district rather than the specific needs of the school. In contrast, the involvement of senior staff at district level is limited which hampers the school in validating its evaluations of effectiveness.

Criterion 5: Partnerships with parents and community

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

Parents are very pleased to belong to what one described as the "Tracey family". They know that the school has their children's best interests at heart and that, where there are difficulties, they will be solved. The principal, teachers and senior staff are accessible. Overall, parents find the information provided by the school useful, particularly in meeting with teachers to discuss their child's progress, and they appreciate the information that they have received about developments to the curriculum, for example in the introduction of the new mathematics curriculum. Although they say that the information sent by the school about the progress made by their children is useful, they also say that more and more consistent information about the levels at which their children are working and what is needed to get to the next stage would be even more valuable. Parents feel that they are listened to and their opinions valued. Because of this, parents are aware that the school is working to ensure a coherent policy for homework through all classes and grades. They also appreciate the fact that the principal has taken a stand over the issue of snack time, and has set down clear expectations for students to continue working, while taking refreshment. They echo the principal's view in describing a difference in style between teachers but as yet are uncertain what the school is doing to address this.

The principal is committed to making use of the school and its facilities as a community resource. As well as providing space for local organizations, such as cub scouts, the school's outdoor field space is very well used by local sporting organizations. In line with the changing demographics of the area, the school is actively seeking ways to help its Spanish speaking parents to feel more welcome and involved. The involvement of the school's social worker is having a positive impact on this. As well as the outreach work

already undertaken in liaison with district staff, she is beginning to develop ways of more effectively reaching parents who require help with homework and other aspects of academic support.

The school is proactive in seeking examples of best practice in other schools, and in sharing its own practice where appropriate. Visits have been undertaken to other schools, which have had a positive impact on the practice of those staff who have been involved. At the same time, the school has hosted visitors from other schools who have been interested to see successful examples of the school's work such as the literacy lab.