



**CSDE**

**QUALITY REVIEW FINAL REPORT**

**Danbury Public Schools**

# **Quality Review Report**

**Rogers Park Middle School**

**21 Memorial Drive  
Danbury  
Connecticut  
06810**

**Principal: Patricia Joaquim**

**Dates of review: November 5 - 6, 2008**

**Reviewer: Beverly Parkinson**

**Cambridge Education (LLC)**



**Cambridge  
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## Part 1: The School Context

### Information about the school:

Rogers Park Middle School is located in the district of Danbury and serves 1,024 students in grades 6 through 8. The school population comprises 8 percent Asian American students, 12 percent Black students, 36 percent Hispanic students and 44 percent White students. Forty-two percent of students are from homes where English is not the main language spoken and 18 percent of students are not fluent in English. There are 21 different home languages spoken. The largest group is Spanish speaking. The school identifies 12 percent of students as in need of special education. At 51 percent, the proportion of students eligible for free or reduced price meals is above the State average. In 2007-08, attendance was 94.6 percent, which is close to the Connecticut State average in middle schools.

The school is divided into three clusters in each grade and has recently opened a small 'Exploration Academy,' which serves 50 students from each of grades 6 and 7. This will expand to serve all three grades next year. The academy has an interdisciplinary thematic approach to the curriculum. This academy enrolls students from across and outside the district. The school has had many changes in administration during the four years since the current principal took her position and has only had the core leadership team in place since September of this year.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well:

The principal and administrative team have a clear and realistic view of the strengths and areas for improvement within the school. This is based on their good understanding of effective instructional strategies and analysis of student performance data.

Relationships between adults and students in the school are generally supportive. Students feel that they are respected and as a result, behavior in lessons and around the school is good.

The broad curriculum provides a wide range of opportunities particularly in art, music and the world language program. Students benefit from a good emphasis on character development and student well being.

### Areas for Improvement:

As a matter of urgency, work with the district and professional associations to establish clear job descriptions and clarify expectations, responsibilities and accountability at all levels within and across the school.

Ensure that the school mission statement and values are agreed and consistently applied to the work of the school.

Improve communication by establishing clear agreed systems and responsibilities for notifying all stakeholders about necessary information. Display key documentation, such as the mission statement and action plans, around the school in order to maintain the improvement focus.

Establish and communicate widely a strategic plan for school improvement that defines measurable goals, actions and strategies for improving school effectiveness and how the school plans to monitor progress toward reaching these goals.

Build on current examples of good practice to improve the quality of instruction by:

- o ensuring that all staff implement agreed instructional strategies effectively;
- o raising expectations of student achievement; and
- o differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all abilities and learning styles.

Implement a more regular, structured program for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning with clear focus and accountability for the implementation of agreed instructional strategies.

Make more effective use of data to identify what, why and how students learn in order to:

- o meet differing needs, interest levels and learning styles of students; and
- o challenge and extend the learning of higher achieving students.

## Part 3: Main Findings

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

#### **This school needs improvement.**

After several years of change in school administration, Rogers Park Middle School now has a substantive leadership team in place. School leaders and district support staff have a clear view of the school's current position and how to move forward. The school does not yet have a written strategic plan and does not communicate fully its vision and plans to all stakeholders. There is a lack of clarity about some staff responsibilities and accountabilities, which disrupts the development of the school. School improvement is held back by a lack of trust and respect among some staff members and the constraints put on the school administration team to monitor classroom practice and to provide instructional leadership.

The school is year four in need of improvement under the criteria set by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Although there have been small gains in the percentage of students achieving proficiency in reading and math, these are similar to those across the State and so the school is making insufficient progress toward closing the gap between school and State performance levels.

Most teachers have good classroom management skills, as well as knowledge of their subject and the State curriculum requirements. However there are wide variations in the quality of instruction and there are too few lessons where teachers modify their teaching to meet the needs of different groups of students. Too many lessons consist only of teacher talk and independent practice. Where teaching is varied, including hands-on activities and discussion, students are motivated and enthusiastic. In other lessons, students are passive and often disengaged.

The school curriculum is constantly under review and is broad and wide ranging. The school does not always make the best use of its flexibility to build on the interests and needs of all students. There are some areas of good practice where the curriculum is modified to meet the needs of specific subgroups in the school but these are the exception rather than the rule. The school has strong programs for character development, health and welfare that support positive attitudes and conduct. Students participate in many programs such as the Purple Hand Pledge and Red Ribbon, an anti-drug initiative.

Relationships between adults and students in the school are mostly helpful and respectful. Classrooms and hallways are calm, safe places and the school has worked hard in recent years to establish clear behavioral expectations. Students respond well to the standards set for them but are rarely challenged to meet higher expectations. Parents have few structured opportunities to participate in the life of the school although some clusters welcome their input more than others do.

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

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

The school did not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets in 2008 in reading or math and is in year four in need of improvement. The school met the AYP indicator for writing. Results in the Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMTs) in reading, math and science are below those of the State. In both math and reading, the school did not make AYP as a whole school. Two of the seven reported subgroups, Asian American and White students, made AYP in both subjects. Of all other subgroups, none made AYP in either reading or math. At district level, comparisons are unreliable as there is only one other middle

school. The school does not make comparisons with the progress of students in other districts with similar demographic backgrounds.

Compared to the results of 2006-07, the whole school and every subgroup show improvement in the percentage of students achieving at proficient level or better. This progress is not sufficient to close the gap between the school's scores and those of the State or to meet AYP as requirements were raised. The school has identified that student achievement declines in grade 6 with the transition from elementary to middle school. In grades 7 and 8 progress between cohorts and subjects varies, but overall trends are in line with the State. There was a decline in achievement levels in 2008 in grade 8, which is attributed to behavioral issues. While the situation is not deteriorating, the school is not making any significant sustained progress in closing the gap between their current position and State expectations.

In the last year, the performance of students with disabilities and English language learners increased significantly and improved more than in other subgroups. The school attributes the increases in the performance of English language learners to more focused instructional approaches, but is unable to identify specific practices that brought about improvement for students with disabilities. Although there is significant improvement in the performance of these two subgroups, it is still insufficient to meet the requirements of AYP. There are very small differences in the achievements of males and females. In math, males achieve slightly higher than females, which is against State trends. In reading, females perform slightly better than male students but the gap is smaller than across the State. Black students achieve better than their peers across the State although their progress is not as good as it should be. Hispanic students make better progress than the State averages.

The school is at a very early stage in the utilization of data and relies strongly on the results provided by the district for State and interim benchmark data. There are few district tests in the middle school years. Therefore, the school has little idea how well individual students, grades, clusters or subgroups are progressing toward the CMT requirements.

## **Criterion 2: The quality of teaching, learning and the use of assessment data**

### **This area of the school's work needs improvement.**

Most teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding of the district and State requirements. However, there are wide variations in the application of this expertise. The district curriculum is broad and provides teachers with opportunities to align their instruction with the needs and interests of learners to motivate and interest them. In many lessons, this is not utilized and students are passive and often disengaged. The school mission statement is to encourage lifelong learning but is not prominently displayed or implemented. There are too few areas around the school which suggest a quest for learning, high achievement or celebration of success. When students participate in hands on activities, field trips or work in groups or pairs and are able to discuss their work they feel that learning is fun. Many students say they enjoy science and social studies and some students in the Exploration Academy feel they are learning more than in other classes. However, this is too minimal and many students are not motivated or enthusiastic and feel that they are not challenged enough or encouraged to aim higher.

Most teachers use positive behavior techniques and have effective classroom management skills, but where expectations are unclear or inconsistently applied, disruptions occasionally occur. The school does not have an overall, consistently applied approach to behavior management. There are general school behavioral expectations but there are also different expectations and strategies in each of the 'clusters.' Strategies for dealing with more challenging behavior are applied inconsistently with some students removed from their classes and missing their learning.

Due to the local teacher union contractual interpretation, there is no system in place in the district to require teachers to record or report their planning or results of assessments. Teachers use data from class tests and online Blue Ribbon assessments to evaluate student learning but no recorded evidence is

currently available. Teachers' understanding of common formative assessment is limited, as assessment is interpreted by many as testing. A small minority of teachers display a learning objective and refer to it, use rubrics and have good questioning techniques for assessing student understanding. For the majority, lessons consist of teacher talk and independent practice. Without adequate records of lesson outcomes teachers are unable to ensure continuity and sufficient progress of students. In one lesson, for example, a teacher forgot that the coverage of a previous lesson was incomplete and assumed that students had a level of understanding which they had not reached. The majority of lessons consist of whole class instruction and do little to recognize different learning styles or needs of all students. Students who finish class work are given other, sometimes more challenging, worksheets or 'fun' activities such as word searches to complete which does not extend their learning. In reading, where the workshop model is implemented, texts are better matched to student reading levels. This is, however, not fully implemented by all teachers.

The school is beginning to implement a co-teaching model for students with disabilities and English language learners. Where teachers plan together and provide specific targeted instruction and activities for different abilities and needs, this is effective in bringing about improvement. In a reading class, one group of students received additional direct instruction from one teacher while others read independently and took part in reading conferences with the other teacher. Where the second teacher merely acts as support for the subject teacher the impact does not justify the high cost of this arrangement. The cluster arrangement in the school provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate but the stringent restrictions on teacher time prohibit the full benefit of this organization. There is a strong emphasis on professional development to bring about school improvement but little evidence in classrooms to show its impact. Administrators and the State Education Resource Center provide workshops for staff.

### **Criterion 3: The effectiveness of the curriculum to meet the needs of the students**

#### **This area of the school's work needs improvement.**

The district curriculum is aligned closely to the State standards. It enables teachers to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of the school population. The curriculum is broad and provides students with a wide range of experiences and opportunities, including the arts and a world language. The district curriculum is not detailed enough and gives the school little guidance beyond State requirements. In all subjects, the curriculum is successful in covering the necessary content although delivery does not always match the written curriculum. Most subject areas have a written school curriculum, although this is in the process of being revised in some. At present, there is no systematic development of core skills vertically or across and between different subject areas. The curriculum in the Exploration Academy attempts to address this through a cross curricular approach but is in the very earliest stages of development. Although the school respects and values the range of cultural backgrounds represented in the school, they do not use every opportunity to build on this in the curriculum. The school does not yet align the unified arts curriculum with the core subject curricula, which inhibits opportunities for arts teachers to link their subject matter with other areas. The school curriculum and supporting documentation for math is less detailed and well developed and therefore does not give sufficient guidance for teachers to provide continuity and progression.

The school makes some efforts to modify the curriculum for specific groups of students, in particular students with disabilities and English language learners. However, these effective modifications all take place outside the general education classes, where there is little differentiated instruction. Some teachers are not aware of modifications or accommodations for students with disabilities. There is an exciting science based extension program, the Summit Investigation Group, which provides for gifted and talented students. The curriculum follows the State requirements but has faster pace and extends and challenges students who complete a variety of projects and make good use of technology. There is a valuable opportunity for Spanish speakers to celebrate and practice their home language in a small group, maintaining their cultural heritage. For students who find the mainstream classroom too challenging, there is a self contained unit where small group and individual instruction can take place for identified

students in a more nurturing environment. This opportunity is effective for most students but is under-utilized as students are often left to work independently on their classwork while adults supervise, rather than interact with, students. The Exploration Academy aims to meet the needs of all students and is partially effective but is still developing its approach. Most teachers use homework to support classwork but the systems to monitor its completion vary between clusters.

#### **Criterion 4: Students' personal character development**

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

Student behavior around the school and in classes is mostly good. This is a significant improvement in the last four years. Small lapses are resolved swiftly and effectively, although strategies for dealing with the occasional more challenging behaviors are less well developed. Even when the lessons are not interesting, most students are compliant. Attitudes to learning are generally positive and students apply themselves to the tasks in hand. However, they are not challenged or encouraged to achieve more as expectations generally are not high enough. Students like their teachers, trust and respect them. They feel that there are many adults in school who listen to them and provide support. They readily approach their teacher, the guidance counselor, school nurse or social worker if they need to. The new school based health center provides further support. The character development program in grade 6 is effective in developing positive attitudes. Relationships between students are generally good. On the occasions they work in pairs or groups they do so with maturity and obvious enjoyment. Most students are able to work independently.

There are some opportunities for students to demonstrate personal maturity, to take initiative within the school and to contribute to the local community. When they are given opportunities, they do so with maturity and consideration. They can help in the office, library or nurses' office. The student council coordinates fund raisers and social events. The Junior Honor Society contributes to community projects. The school has recently surveyed students for their view of the school as part of their involvement with the New England League of Middle Schools. Students clearly understand the difference between right and wrong. There are daily character building 'words of wisdom' each morning, which effectively promote the values of the school and set the tone for the day. Attendance is in line with the State average and students respond well to the school's robust procedures for checking on any unreported absences. There are relatively few tardies although students are sometimes held back in one class or have to move a long distance between lessons, which makes them late for the next class.

#### **Criterion 5: School Climate**

##### **This area of the school's work needs improvement.**

The efforts of school leaders and a core group of staff members to encourage high expectations and to provide opportunities for students to use initiative or take responsibility, contribute effectively to the calm atmosphere in the school. However, not all staff consistently have high expectations. The student designed logo which uses the school initials to show 'Respect and Pride in My School' is not used widely enough to promote the school identity. The school is successful in ensuring that students attend school and has effective procedures to eliminate truancy. They take part in activities such as the Purple Hand Pledge to show their commitment to a positive school climate.

Students respond well to the levels of expectation set for them. Expectations for student achievement and behavior vary between clusters and classes. In many cases, expectations are not high enough and students are not challenged enough in their work. Some lessons generate a quest for learning but these are a minority. There are too few opportunities for students to work collaboratively. They often work quietly on individual tasks. School leaders communicate the need for higher achievement but this is not yet evident at classroom level, where there is often a lack of pace or sense of urgency. Relationships

between students and adults in the school are usually respectful and trusting. This is because there are clear principles in place which are communicated through the school website and around the school. The school responds rapidly to any incidents of bullying or other unacceptable behaviors.

The school is at a very early stage in terms of setting targets. The Outcome Achievement Plan (OAP) provides overall school targets for reading and math based on State and district requirements but does not show how this relates to each grade or cluster based on prior achievement. Proposed actions lack specific focus relating to student outcomes and so this does not provide a useful working document for the school. The content of the OAP is not understood widely enough beyond school leaders. Students do not have individual targets and so have no understanding of how well they could achieve.

## **Criterion 6: Effective Leadership and Management**

### **This area of the school's work needs improvement.**

The principal and two assistant principals form a small administrative team. There have been several unsettled years in administrative positions before establishing this key group in September. The school leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths, where it needs to improve and how this can be brought about. They share positive aims and directions for the school. An extended school leadership team of representatives from each school cluster has been formed to monitor the school progress and develop understanding of the need for improvement. However, this group is in its infancy and as yet there is little understanding or acceptance among many staff of the sense of urgency and need for change. Some areas of the school, such as special education, have external leadership through shared district appointments, which contribute effectively to the school. However, without further external support the school does not have the capacity to achieve its goals.

Key decisions made by school leaders are strongly based on the needs of students identified through data and their good understanding of effective instruction. Faculty meetings have a strong instructional focus. Most staff have the capacity to contribute to school improvement, but the school is hampered by a significant group who are unwilling to review school practices based on the needs of students. Due to the restrictions imposed by arrangements with the teacher union, school leaders are impeded from monitoring work in classrooms except for statutory teacher evaluations. School leaders have no way of checking what is going well, where help may be needed or for sharing good practice due to this constraint.

Special arrangements and school organization provide opportunities for core subject staff in each cluster to work collaboratively. The tight restriction on teacher working time limits the effectiveness of these arrangements. Current scheduling does not allow unified arts staff to be fully part of the teams, thus limiting their contribution to collaborative planning and reflection. The school has not yet established a suitable middle school schedule to meet the school's needs, causing frustration for staff with frequent changes as it tries to find a solution.

The OAP is a limited document and is not widely shared. It is based on the district and State improvement requirements and is an outline for future progress. It is not detailed enough however to be useful. The mission statement, aims for the school and the school's targets for improvement are not published widely enough for all key groups to grasp the urgency of the school's need for improvement and adaptation of practices. The district plays a key and useful role in providing school leaders with an analysis of their data. There is not yet a systematic timeframe for the collection and analysis of interim data to support progress toward school targets.

## **Criterion 7: Partnerships with Parents and Community**

### **This area of the school's work needs improvement.**

The school has a small, but active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) that organizes fundraising events for the school such as a Book Store and Design the School T-Shirt Contest. Through this forum, parents are able to communicate with administration and learn about future plans but are not involved in school decision making. The principal is approachable, respectful and sensitive to parents' concerns and has built strong relationships with a core group of supportive parents. While parents who volunteer in the school are made to feel welcome, the school does little to elicit further support from others. Many parents do not often come to the school apart from attending parent teacher conferences or to watch concerts. Before students start at Rogers Park, parents are invited to open house which is well attended. The school provides informative workshops for parents such as 'What do the CMT scores mean?' and attendance is increasing. The school celebrates its varied cultural heritage but provides little support for families from the smaller non-English speaking communities other than Spanish and Portuguese.

The school does not share its schools goals or communicate the school's vision to parents. Most information is translated into Spanish and Portuguese and mailed home to all parents. The principal issues a weekly newsletter that is posted online in English and a limited number of hard copies are distributed to each of the homerooms. The school needs to ensure that this is effective enough in ensuring that all families receive the newsletter.

The school has interim academic reports that are sent home in the middle of each marking period and report cards that are sent home at the end. These are limited in their information and do not provide information on targets or next steps in learning. However, some clusters are better at communicating beyond these two school benchmark reports. Some teachers meet with parents outside the set parent conference times to allow more meetings to be held.

Through a grant, the school offers an Extended Learning Time (ELT) program after school, which is open to all of the students and serves as a homework resource. The school participates in many opportunities for the staff and students to be involved in community programs such as Career Day, Mentor Program, and Kids Involved in Doing Service (KIDS) Group. Students in the chorus represent the school in the community. The school has achieved many awards in competitions, such as the State Science Horizons, where they were awarded first place overall, as well as several other prizes.

## **Criterion 8: The role of the district in the work of the school**

### **This area of the school's work needs improvement.**

District administration work well with the school leaders. They have a good understanding of the strengths and the areas for improvement as identified by the school administration and through the analysis of student performance. The district supports the work of the school in raising student achievement through the appointment of the State Education Resource Center to provide professional development. There are currently few opportunities, however, for teachers to develop personal interests or individual needs.

The district has basic systems in place for the analysis of data. The district provides the school with a clear but unsophisticated view of student performance with limited subgroup analysis. This is, however, only accessible to many in paper format and is not utilized to the full by the school in order to set targets for the whole school, grades, subgroups or individual students. The district provides limited curriculum guidance, giving the school a great degree of flexibility and creativity in the formulation of its curriculum. As a result the school has devised a that is well matched to the needs of the students. The school does not receive enough curriculum and instructional support from the district to enable it to raise standards.

The district has so far provided insufficient support to the school leaders to enable them to establish responsibilities and accountability for improvements in student achievement at every level within the school. The district is responsive to school need but there is no strategic plan in place to address the issues in school that are presently impeding its progress.