



**CSDE**

**QUALITY REVIEW FINAL REPORT**

**Danbury Public Schools**

# **Quality Review Report**

**Broadview Middle School**

**72 Hospital Avenue  
Danbury  
Connecticut  
06810**

**Principal: Edward A. Robbs**

**Dates of review: November 6 - 7, 2008**

**Reviewer: Ken Bryan**

**Cambridge Education (LLC)**



**Cambridge  
Education**

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## Part 1: The School Context

### Information about the school:

Broadview Middle School is located in the Danbury district and has an enrollment of 1,145 students in grades 6 through 8. The school population comprises 57 percent White, 23 percent Hispanic, 10 percent Black and 9 percent Asian American students. The school has identified approximately 11 percent of its population as students with disabilities. Fewer than 11 percent of students are English language learners. These students predominantly speak Spanish or Portuguese. Attendance is 95.4 percent, which is broadly in line with district and State figures. Twenty-eight percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, which is less than the district figure. The school is culturally diverse, where 32 percent of students come from homes where English is not the primary language. Thirty different languages are represented in the school overall.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well:

- The principal and his administration are well respected and they have created a positive professional working environment.
- Students with disabilities and English language learners make good progress as they move through the school.
- The school effectively develops the students' personal character and they demonstrate very good attitudes towards learning in classrooms, behave extremely well and form positive relationships with each other and with adults in school.
- Teachers work collaboratively and demonstrate a shared commitment to improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- The school has developed good links with parents who receive effective communication about the personal and academic development of their children.

### Areas for Improvement:

- Determine ways of monitoring classroom practice more systematically and regularly to impact upon the quality of student learning and progress.
- Develop a school improvement plan that defines measurable goals, specifies actions, identifies responsibilities, determines timeframes, includes success criteria and monitors and measures progress towards its goals through the analysis of data.
- Establish a school wide system to formally plan, review and develop the curriculum.
- Ensure differentiation caters to students of all abilities through the modification of resources and instructional methods.
- Continue to develop common formative and benchmark assessments to provide interim data to better understand how well the school is doing and to inform planning and teaching.

## Part 3: Main Findings

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

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

Although Broadview Middle School needs improvement, based upon its failure to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the second year, the principal and his staff have laid the clear foundations for future growth and development. The principal and his administration are well respected, the staff are very collaborative and the overall school climate is highly conducive to learning. The students behave extremely well and demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning. As a result of this stable and nurturing environment, targeted subgroups of students have made significant gains over the past three years, including English language learners and students with disabilities populations. However, the achievement gap between the school and State averages and AYP goals has not closed sufficiently. The school is beginning to use data more effectively to track students who are in need of improvement. In addition, it is now able to disaggregate data more effectively to identify trends and to better demonstrate progress.

The quality of teaching in the school is at best satisfactory although inconsistent across clusters and grades. In the better lessons, the students respond very well to the high expectations set for them and differentiation is effective. In too many classes, differentiation resulting from the analysis of data is used merely as a tool to group students without modifying tasks or activities. The monitoring of teaching and the holding of teachers accountable for their practice is unsatisfactory as weaknesses are not challenged appropriately. The principal and his administration recognize the need to be more proactive in this area to ensure equity and consistency. Overall, the school's curriculum is sufficiently broad and meets the needs of the majority of students in this diverse learning community. However, the curriculum lacks the necessary coherence, modification and interconnections. The school has started to create common formative assessments to provide benchmark data to better inform progress towards its goals and to help the students and teachers prepare for the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT). This is an exciting and worthwhile development.

The principal and his administration have a clear vision for the future development of the school. However, the leadership team lacks a coherent school improvement plan which draws together the priorities, key personnel, resources and timeframes required to complete its key tasks. In a school where teachers are beginning to embrace the data driven decision making agenda, the creation of a collaborative and coherent strategic development plan is essential.

Broadview Middle School is a safe and welcoming learning community. Good links with the parents and caregivers have been created and the firm foundations for sustained growth are established; a respected leadership, a collaborative staff who are committed to school improvement and students who exhibit excellent behavior and attitudes.

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

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

The school did not meet AYP targets in 2007-08 or the previous year. Significantly, the school has consistently met its whole school AYP targets in both math and in reading but fails to achieve the required measure for some subgroups. While White and Asian American students consistently achieve AYP, other subgroups achieve less well. The categorization of the school masks an underlying picture of growth and achievement. For the past three years, there has been significant improvement in subgroup performance. Sustained and notable growth can be identified in math and reading for students with disabilities, English

language learners and economically disadvantaged students. For example, the growth of the students with disabilities and English language learner subgroups in reading has been 16 percentage points in three years. In addition, significant growth is evident for Black and Hispanic students, which exceeds that of White students. Growth remains strong despite the achievement gap remaining constant as the proficiency benchmark is raised year-on-year. However, the school is not complacent about its performance and strives to narrow the differential.

In reading, writing and mathematics, the school exceeds the district averages for goal achievement but is lower than State except for grade 7 in mathematics. The school compares its performance against the other district middle school to determine trends and this has had a positive impact on the provision for students with disabilities. The school is now beginning to disaggregate data to better determine the relative performance of boys and girls and higher achieving students. Early analysis of the initial data shows that the numbers of students moving from proficient to goal and from goal to advanced levels has increased steadily, particularly in writing (whole school) and for Hispanic students in mathematics, reading and writing. This has been mirrored by equivalent growth in the performance of the English language learning students.

The school has successfully identified a target population of students in need of improvement. Its 'target' and 'watch' subgroups consist of students in need of academic interventions. These are tracked carefully using a 'traffic light' system of red, green and yellow. The school's cluster data teams carefully monitor these students to determine interventions. This is a rigorous process, which includes an analysis of scale scores to ensure accuracy. As a result of this rigor, the school is able to demonstrate the rapid growth of its targeted students and subgroups.

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

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

Students respond very well to the high expectations their teachers set for them. In the better lessons, activities are stimulating and motivating and are geared effectively to meet the needs of all students. In particular, students respond well to classes such as chorus and band. These are taught in a purpose-built facility, which includes a high quality auditorium. Here the students achieve high quality instruction and clearly enjoy learning. While teachers' subject knowledge is adequate to teach the curriculum, some do not use a range of methods to effectively differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs of English language learners and students with disabilities. Too often, the analysis of classroom data leads to the grouping of students without the necessary modifications to teaching styles and resources. In the more successful classes, teachers and additional adults make modifications to materials and resources to better suit the learning styles of the students. There are many examples of good or satisfactory practice but this is inconsistent across the school and within clusters and grades. Classroom environments reflect some consistency, such as the many teacher-produced displays, the displaying of classroom rules and the explicit posting of class objectives and main activities. Teachers and students have developed very positive relationships; the students behave very well in class and demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning. Displays of student work on bulletin boards in hallways demonstrate very high standards in writing and the students rightly enjoy the level of celebration this engenders. For example, fine examples of persuasive writing are to be seen related to the recent presidential elections.

Teachers use diagnostic, summative and formative assessments and the resultant data is analyzed effectively by the assistant principals and cluster teams. Increasingly, the teachers are using 'Blue Ribbon' formative assessments to better understand student progress throughout the year and for preparation for the CMTs. Data driven decision making is in its relative infancy and it is too early to determine the impact upon planning and differentiation. In addition, the school's curriculum is insufficiently developed to have an impact upon continuity and progression from one grade to another. The school is now developing its own benchmark and common formative assessments to help drive instruction and the teachers have welcomed this new initiative.

Most teachers work very collaboratively within their departments, clusters and grades and the use of professional development is beginning to be effective as data is now being used to inform in-school provision. District wide professional development days are welcomed, such as support for teachers new to the profession through BEST (Beginning Educator Support and Training).

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

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

The school provides a range and depth of curricular offerings that have contributed to recent improvements in test scores for the whole school and support for most subgroups currently not making AYP. The breadth and depth of the curriculum largely ensures that students are able to pursue a variety of interests in addition to the academic core subjects. However, there is a large discrepancy between the practiced curriculum and the written curriculum. Teachers are disadvantaged during lesson planning and assessment by the formal curriculum documents available to them. Formal curriculum documents are incomplete, outdated and are currently not up to State standards for curriculum design. There is no system in place to formally plan, review and develop the curriculum among teachers and administrators, resulting in learning and teaching that is too variable across the school.

The school's district driven 'learning guides' lack direct links to identified curriculum standards, and do not indicate the degree to which assessments, instructional strategies, learning activities, instructional materials, and technology reinforce the educational program's objectives. The current state of the written curriculum is an obstacle to the development of common formative assessments.

Students with disabilities and English language learner curriculum documents are more comprehensive. The school largely uses an inclusion model with targeted pullout support. Better coordination between special needs and regular education teachers would further raise the level of learning for students with disabilities. While there is outstanding special education resource support in terms of the number of staff to reinforce the curriculum for students with disabilities, there is only one bilingual and one English as a second language (ESL) teacher for 120 English language learning students. Staff reported significant barriers to the provision of English language learner support since the change from a nine period day to the current eight period day. As a result, there are too few English language learner support teachers despite the fact that this school houses the sizeable district wide program for Portuguese-speaking English language learners.

Most teachers blend a strong combination of textbooks and project based work. Some teachers plan a wide range of exciting and practical learning experiences, although this is not consistent among all teachers. Didactic, teacher-driven lessons are evident in some classrooms with little inquiry or group activities to fully engage student interest. Pacing guides have been created and appear to be used effectively by classroom teachers. Classroom instructional materials are apportioned inconsistently and textbook update and replacement is not consistent across subject areas. However, textbooks observed in classrooms and literature housed in the library, positively reinforce the cultural identities of this diverse school. Students who struggle in mathematics participate in a distance-tutoring program with tutors from a high school in Mississippi, while students struggling in literacy or math utilize an effective after school tutoring program. Homework usually supports learning in class, while higher achieving students are given additional and different assignments/projects that allow them to develop advanced skills.

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

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

The behavior of the students is very good, in classrooms and around the school. Minor incidents of off-task or disruptive behavior are infrequent and swiftly dealt with, using rigorous and consistent procedures and vigilance. It is significant that the students behave responsibly even during unsupervised periods, particularly in the hallways, before and after school and during transition. Most students make a positive contribution to the school community and they show initiative. For example, there is a vibrant and effective student council which coordinates fund raising and social events. The forthcoming 'spirit week' aims to energize the students during the long winter months! The students work well together in groups or independently when given the opportunity. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong and this is particularly evident in classrooms during discussions. It is clear from the negligible number of racist or sexist incidents that the students, in this very diverse community, show respect to one another.

The students have developed very positive relationships with one another and with staff. Because of this level of engagement, the nurturing environment and the overall tone within the school, attendance rates are high and improving further. During the review, student absence was as low as 3 percent, which is better than district and State averages.

The students respond well to the expectations the school sets for them. The school recognizes the need to improve differentiation strategies and formative assessments to better inform the academic guidance of the students. At present, individualized learning goals are not specific enough and do not relate to current data. However, many students commented on the good quality of academic guidance they receive through the many conversations with the guidance counselor and with the teachers. Students and teachers have developed very good relationships and the overall school environment is very conducive to learning.

## **Criterion 5: School Climate**

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

High expectations are shared with the students and the school community and individualized learning goals are shared with each student through regular conferencing. However, these lack precision as the use of formative assessments is only just beginning to have an impact upon goal setting.

Behavior codes are routinely followed and there is a high degree of vigilance and supervision. The staff set high expectations for behavior and for academic achievement and the response by the students is very good. Incidents of unacceptable behavior, racism and sexism are rare and the school's procedures for dealing with those infrequent lapses are robust and consistently applied by most staff.

Similarly, good attendance is given a high priority by the school. Procedures to challenge absence are rigorous and consistently followed and the school celebrates good attendance with the student to good effect. The attendance committee is an effective group. It constantly monitors the rates of absence and tardiness to identify trends. Individual students are monitored and interventions are timely and effective. Consequently, the attendance rate for the school is in line with district and State averages and continues to grow. The school recognizes the need to further develop the use of incentives to raise levels of attendance further using homeroom or cluster wide competitions.

Opportunities for collaborative or independent working are developing. In some classes, students are given the opportunity to work in pairs and in small groups. Students will confer with partners or work collaboratively on tasks and they demonstrate good attitudes to each other and relish those opportunities. However, there are too few examples of this. Many teachers will retain full control and teach too didactically, reducing the opportunities for students to work in groups.

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

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

The school's leadership has positive aims and a clear vision for the school community, but due to the lack of a cohesive school improvement plan, it fails to provide the necessary urgency and clarity. The principal and his administration have created a very positive professional working environment and school climate. They are well respected and this forms an ideal and essential foundation for further growth. The core values of 'respect for people, property and the ideas of others' lie at the heart of school life. With the support of a collaborative and collegial staff, the principal and his administration recognize the need to develop a school improvement plan that defines measurable goals and specifies actions and strategies for improving school effectiveness. The plan must include success criteria and key staff assigned to monitor and measure progress towards its goals through the analysis of data.

The principal and his administration are effective in their promotion of high expectations for the whole school community. However, there remain inconsistencies between grades, cluster and classes. The principal understands the need to monitor classroom practice more systematically and regularly in order to impact upon the quality of student learning and progress. Clusters of classes within each grade work too autonomously and individual teachers lack accountability, resulting in inconsistencies across grades. The principal and his administration have plans to monitor the effectiveness of differentiation and best practices and to provide developmental feedback to the entire faculty. Opportunities for teams to meet collaboratively in common planning periods enable teachers to meet to discuss data and to plan within clusters. The creation of further opportunities to consider interdisciplinary projects would positively enhance the learning experience of the students. Significantly, the reduction of the school's schedule to an eight period day has had a detrimental impact upon provision and equity for all students and upon teacher morale.

Most teachers and the school leadership are developing their confidence and competence in the use of data. At a strategic level, the understanding of data is now beginning to impact upon school improvement planning. Within clusters, data driven decision making is also starting to have a considerable impact on tracking student progress and informing the use of timely interventions. As a result, the school community has a better idea about how well it is doing. The school also recognizes the need to display school data in the form of data walls to incorporate subgroup progress, the growth of the 'track' and 'watch' students and attendance, as it strives to make AYP.

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

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

The principal, through his outstanding 'people' skills, has forged a sound relationship with parents. He and the administrative team have worked closely with an established and supportive group of parents and the staff to increase parental involvement in the school. Parents feel the school is very approachable and its openness stems from the principal. He is highly regarded and respected throughout the school and wider community.

Parental participation and attendance in workshops and parent teacher meetings is increasing. There is a strong group of parents who support the school's work on a daily basis. They help to organize student activities and provide support on field trips. A recent survey has enabled the school to gather parent views and to start to build these into the decision making process. However, there is no parent representation in formal school improvement discussions or in data driven decision making.

Most teachers communicate regularly with parents about their children's achievements. Parents receive timely information when their children are in danger of failing through the teacher's website, by e-mail and phone exchange, as well as through the daily "planner" that must be signed by parents. Further time is

set aside during teacher “cluster” meetings to give parents a forum for addressing concerns with a group of teachers together. As a result, more parents are able to support the school’s work and make a valuable contribution to their children’s education. This is effective communication. Good quality information is available for parents, in Spanish and Portuguese as well as English. The admission process is clear and the school provides good support through the wide range of services available at the school. For example, the principal visits the feeder schools to set clear expectations for students and parents easing the transition for sixth graders entering the school. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) arranges fundraisers for various projects in order to provide extra resources for the school. Regular field trips and visitors from the local community enrich learning and celebrate the school’s diverse cultures. There is a strong respect for the diversity of the school and local community. There are sufficient after school activities to extend and strengthen the students’ educational experiences.

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

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

There is some degree of disconnect between the district central office and the school. Important decisions, initiatives, the development of curriculum and policymaking appear to be top down and not inclusive enough to meet the unique needs of this school.

Curriculum support for content areas and the expertise of the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum is highly valued. There seems to be a mutual respect and trust between the school and central office in its provision of professional development, curriculum leadership and overall funding of the school’s operations.

The school has made great strides in the past 18 months in beginning to examine data with the help of the district data specialist. However, it is clear that they do not receive guidance from or need to report back to a data team within the district. The school is at a point where it significantly needs the support from a highly functioning district data team. They are ready to move from these beginning stages to more advanced stages of data driven decision making and other good practices that emanate from a good school level data team. This effort would also involve a better district centralized data system to make data more accessible to the school level team and to teachers with less dependence on the data specialist. Further, the district can help develop more creative scheduling options to allow more school and grade level data teams to meet.

The district provides insufficient support for teaching and learning. Holding teachers accountable is a major area of school level improvement. The district does not support school leadership in the area of teacher evaluation and teacher accountability. In addition, the entire school community has questioned the wisdom of the district level schedule change from nine periods to eight for its middle schools. There has been a lack of district support to make the transition more effective in maximizing teaching and learning time for the subgroups that are not making AYP.