



New London Public Schools

Quality Review Report

C.B. Jennings School

**90 Cedar Grove Avenue
New London
Connecticut
06320**

Principal: Anna James

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Reviewer: Beverly Parkinson

Cambridge Education (LLC)

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school:

C.B. Jennings School is in temporary accommodations awaiting the completion of a new building, as part of the re-organization and amalgamation of elementary schools in the district. The school has already been split up and partly amalgamated with the Edgerton School, which has now closed. Consequently, the enrollment of the present Jennings School consists of two thirds of the students and staff, including the principal, from Edgerton School and half the students and staff from the previous Jennings School. The transition took place in September 2006. The school has a higher than average number of students who start or leave during the school year.

There are 374 students enrolled in grades kindergarten through 5. The school population comprises 61 percent Hispanic students, 27 percent Black students, 11 percent White students and one percent Asian American and American Indian. There are 43 percent English language learners (ELLs), the majority of whom speak Spanish at home. The school has a dual language program. Ten percent of students have been identified as students with special education needs. Seventy-eight percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches, which is average for the district but above the state average. Attendance is 92 percent, which is average for the district and below the state average.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well:

- The school celebrates the diversity of the community, which helps in engaging stakeholders in the learning process. This provides a strong ethos of care and respect, enabling students to learn.
- The broad curriculum, beyond reading and mathematics offers students a wide range of learning opportunities and makes links between the arts, science and social studies. Students enthuse about their practical experiences.
- The School Enrichment Model Initiative (SEMI) program for gifted and talented students extends student achievement and challenges higher order thinking skills.
- The high level of knowledge and expertise in the literacy team and the teaching and learning committee is beginning to impact on the quality of instruction.

Areas for Improvement:

- Develop a more detailed strategic School Improvement Plan that defines measurable goals, actions and strategies for improving school effectiveness and how the school plans to utilize data to monitor progress toward the goals.
- Improve the quality of instruction by:
 - utilizing data more effectively to identify precisely what, why and how students will learn in lessons;
 - matching work more precisely to the different ability and interest levels of the students; and
 - improving time management and increasing the pace in lessons wherever possible.
- Implement a more regular structured program for monitoring lesson planning and classroom practice with high quality feedback and follow-up. Increase accountability of staff for the implementation of agreed strategies to ensure consistency and rigor across the school.
- Raise standards of achievement particularly in reading by raising expectation, clear identification of underachievement and effective monitored intervention.
- Ensure that the high level of adult support and knowledge is used more effectively to impact on the progress students and the school makes.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The school's overall performance

This school needs improvement.

Despite changes in its designation, according to federal legislation the school is in year three of needing improvement under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Jennings School is emerging from a period of disruption and change. As time moves on, issues and anxieties are being resolved but until the district's reorganization of elementary schools is completed, staff continues to feel unsure about the future. This has hindered school improvement in the last 12 months. The faculty is beginning to work more closely as a team though some relationships remain unproductive. Despite the difficulties faced, the staff has maintained a highly professional manner with students and parents.

Student achievement is at a low level. As two schools amalgamated, there is no comparative data available to understand progress easily. Scores in reading remain low despite the current high levels of support within the school. The dual language program and number of new students affects the level of achievement but expectations are not high enough and students are not sufficiently challenged to achieve better. The school now has the data and useful software to identify where growth is more notable or too slow across the school.

Many programs and initiatives are in place to develop a broad curriculum with good learning opportunities in a range of subjects, which enthuse the students. Successful programs include the arts, science and social studies. Additionally, the SEMI program is having a positive impact in developing higher order thinking skills. However, the implementation of these and other programs is variable, as the school does not monitor their impact on learning systematically enough. Monitoring of classroom practice needs to be more rigorous and focused with greater clarity on the expectations for instruction and consequent learning. The expertise of staff can be further improved through additional professional development and shared more to support others through classroom inter-visitation.

Most students behave well and enjoy their learning. The 'Responsive Classroom model' is effective in setting standards and clear guidance for social skills and behavior. To be truly successful, all adults need to be consistent. Persistently disruptive students need sanctions that are more appropriate and support to help them to manage and change their behavior. Students do not have a voice in the running of the school. A student council would benefit them.

The breadth of leadership across the school is improving as the teaching and learning committee develops their role alongside the effective literacy team. Grade and data teams also meet and contribute to school improvement and monitor student progress. To reach their full potential and to avoid confusion, roles and responsibilities of individuals and teams need more clarity.

The diversity of the local community partnerships with parents and the community support the work of the school. The quality of information provided by the school is accessible to most families. The Family Resource Center is developing activities and courses to meet parents' needs.

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) in 2006-07 in the reading or mathematics Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMT) for the whole school or any reported subgroup. All subgroups and grades achieved AYP in writing. In grades 3, 4 and 5 students achieved well in mathematics compared to

most other schools in the district and in grade 3, they also achieved well in reading. However, scores across the district are significantly lower than the state averages. The reading and writing scores in grades 4 and 5 are the lowest in the district. Although students make progress during their time in school, the majority of students are not improving as fast as they should.

In reading, there are clear differences in achievement with ELLs and Hispanic students achieving less well than Black students. No figures are available for White students. The school has not analyzed the differences in achievement for boys and girls. State data for 2006-07 shows little significant difference in the scores of boys and girls. In mathematics, achievement in all grades is similar to the overall district pattern.

The school is implementing a range of interventions to raise achievement. They are making better use of data to inform instruction at class and grade level and are beginning to use it at group level in the workshop time. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) data from the kindergarten classes is thorough and shows that students are making a good start in early literacy skills.

A high number of students either leave or join the school at times other than the start of the school year. Many arrive with little or no knowledge of English. The school supports these students through language teaching and differentiated activities in the general education classes. The school does not specifically track the progress of those students as a separate group. However, it is able to show that they make similar progress to the ELLs whose main language is Spanish. Indigenous Spanish speakers are taught in dual language classes.

Gifted and talented students in grades 4 and 5 have the opportunity to participate in the SEMI program, provided by the district. Students spend 2 hours twice a week in their groups. This provides extension work and challenging activities. Within the classroom, gifted and talented students complete the same work as their peers and are not always able to achieve the high scores of which they are capable. A team of teachers and classroom aides effectively support students with special education needs, who make limited progress.

The school has recently completed a School Improvement Plan based on the district and state targets for improvement in order to meet AYP. The school does not yet utilize data to set specific grade or class level goals. The plan is very general and needs to include detailed, specific actions with clear timescales for the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards school goals. This will enable the school to recognize its successes and where further improvement is required.

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 uses the 'Open Court' reading program provided by the district for grades kindergarten through 3 and 'Success for All' in grades 4 and 5. The previous Jennings School used the 'Open Court' program but not Edgerton School. Its adoption in the amalgamated school has been problematic. Some teachers felt they were not consulted or given enough time or professional development prior to implementation. As a result, there are a high number of misinterpretations and misunderstandings amongst teachers about making the best use of the program. The literacy coaches work hard to support teachers and to make reading a richer experience for students but still find that there is great inconsistency in implementation. This leads to difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of the program and hinders student progress.

There is no mathematics consultant in the district and no mathematics coach in the school. Mathematics has not been identified as such a high priority, as CMT scores are higher than in reading. Scores in mathematics decreased from 2006-07 across all cohorts.

There have been several recent and rapidly introduced initiatives alongside the school reorganization program, leading to an atmosphere of disharmony and distrust amongst some staff. However, trust is gradually building and collaborative working is developing which is beginning to have a positive impact. Due to timetable changes, teachers' planning time has been reduced, leading to further anxieties.

Without a more structured and detailed School Improvement Plan the staff is unsure about the introduction and evaluation of each initiative. Support and professional development at district level is of high quality but the school improvement planning cycle lacks clarity, structure, and accountability. The school is a 'Reading First' school, which brings additional resources and coaching. The impact of this is limited and the school should evaluate why this is so and ensure, through careful planning, that there is more rapid progress.

Teachers regularly assess and record student progress. They use DIBELS, Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA), and the annual CMT scores. Data teams and the new teaching and learning committee regularly monitor progress. A visual display of student levels in each grade is designed to show progress throughout the year. Decisions are made about student groupings and intervention strategies to raise student achievement. The effectiveness of these groups cannot yet be evaluated as they have only been in place for a short time. School leadership needs to monitor implementation and effectiveness of their decisions as part of whole school development.

Teachers differentiate instruction during the 'workshop' session. Teachers use this daily 45-minute lesson for additional literacy skills development work. They plan activities to support individuals and groups of students where teachers have identified difficulties. The 'Open Court' core reading program lacks differentiation, which means that many students are not making enough progress for much of the time. To support this program, some staff requires further professional development in differentiating instruction.

Some lessons lack pace and students lose concentration. Teachers do not always provide additional work or work that is more challenging to students who finish their task quickly. In other lessons, teachers do not always prepare in advance, resulting in lost learning time. For example, a multimedia presentation was not ready for the lesson and art materials were not prepared in advance.

The school uses the 'Responsive Classroom' model as a core behavior and social skills program. This program encourages students to realize the impact of their behavior on others and develops skills for learning. All elementary schools in the district use this model. The program is very effective in some classrooms but is not applied consistently by all staff. Students commented that some students persistently disrupt the learning of others.

The strong emphasis placed on the teaching of reading limits the time available for the rest of the curriculum. The school works hard to maintain as much breadth as possible in the curriculum and to make links between the arts, science, mathematics and literacy. In science, there are often practical activities, greatly enjoyed by the students. In art and music specials, students are able to practice skills and techniques. Regular presentations and displays around the school celebrate the high quality of students' work in these classes.

There are limited after school programs during this transitional period. A small number of students learn to play musical instruments. The district provides additional groups, such as Bio Buddies, Freedom Riders and Circle of Friends.

Criterion 3: Students' personal character development

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

The school adopted the 'Responsive Classroom' model as part of a districtwide policy as used in Edgerton School. There are now far fewer referrals for behavioral incidents to the principal. Most students have positive attitudes to learning but a few persistently disrupt others. Not all staff implements the model effectively. The school should address this inconsistency to enable all students to behave well so they can participate actively in class and make progress. In addition, the school needs to review the effectiveness of sanctions and ensure that persistent disruption is not allowed to continue. Arrangements for students with challenging behaviors also needs reviewing.

There are a few opportunities for students to take responsibility and show initiative. Fifth graders call the bus announcements at the end of each day. A group of students started an initiative to encourage recycling. Another group wrote to the superintendent in an imaginative style to ask for some non-uniform days in the school year.

Relationships between students are constructive. The Responsive Classroom model helps students with making friends and dealing with conflict. Students are respectful to staff and feel that their teachers 'go the extra mile' to help them. The dual language and inclusive nature of the school ensures that there is no known racist or sexist behavior. Students are aware of the needs of others and do what they can to help new students settle in.

Attendance is 92 percent, which is about average for the district but below the state. The school and district have robust systems in place for following up absences. Teachers send work home to help students catch up. Tardiness is not a significant problem and the school uses a range of means to support students and families.

Most students respond well to the school's expectations. They try to follow instructions carefully and to work hard. Some students in the older grades know their targets and what they need to do to improve. Students are proud of their achievements and know that they are valued by the school. The school should improve attitudes about the CMT tests by building regular practice into the curriculum.

Criterion 4: Effective leadership and management

This area of the school's work needs improvement.

The school has been through a period of uncertainty and there is likely to be further change as the district finalizes its reorganization program. There was a very short period for the schools to plan together for the changes ahead and to merge two different philosophies. The principal came from Edgerton, so she was well known to one group. This led to hostility between staff members as the two groups joined. As time passes, the antagonism is decreasing but there remains a strong feeling of resentment. The principal has a clear vision for the future direction of the school. However, not all staff fully understands and agrees with this so the school is not moving forward as a united, consistent force. For the parents and students, the transition has been well managed by the school. Parents from both previous schools feel the teachers are highly committed to their students' welfare.

The school leadership rightly focuses attention on the low level of achievement in reading. The school has two literacy coaches to work with teachers, one Reading First and one from the district, and in addition has one part time Reading First External Facilitator and five part time literacy tutors. Some of these appointments are very recent. Despite this high level of support, the impact of the intervention in raising student achievement is not sufficient and implementation remains inconsistent. To raise achievement, the school needs to implement rigorous, analytical monitoring of the reading curriculum to measure the impact of agreed interventions and strategies and to increase staff accountability.

The recent addition of the teaching and learning committee to school leadership serves as a firm foundation for the future direction of the school. This knowledgeable group represents all the aspects of the school including dual language, special education, grade, and data teams. They monitor student achievement and reorganize groupings. There is not enough clarity about the remit of this group, the literacy coaches and the grade and data teams to ensure that their expertise is used efficiently. Decisions are later questioned and subject to further consultation and changes, delaying their effectiveness.

The school does not yet track student achievement effectively enough by subgroup, grade, or gender to understand where its strengths and weaknesses lie. There is too much emphasis on dual language status as a reason for the school's low scores. The school has many hypotheses about factors that affect progress, but do not provide systematic evidence to support this. The school has recently received a new program developed by Connecticut RESCs, which will enable more detailed analysis of achievement and growth.

The principal carries out the required number of formal lesson observations – once a year for tenured teachers and three times for non-tenured teachers. The principal regularly goes in to most classrooms but feedback is informal, verbal, and limited. With the introduction of new strategies and programs, a more systematic regular process of walk-throughs is required. This very informal method cannot raise the quality of instruction, ensure its consistency, or hold teachers accountable, rigorously enough.

All staff care passionately about the students in their care. The majority of staff understands and supports the school's direction for improvement. Staff express their views and concerns through the teaching and learning committee and at the various faculty and grade meetings. To succeed, the school needs to harness the high level of expertise, make all staff feel valued and work together for the future of the students, supporting each other through the changes ahead.

The district understands the school well. It works hard to bring about improvement in student achievement. It provides programs and strategies to support development. The 'Responsive Classroom' model has been very effective. The 'Open Court' reading program is not as successful. The Reading First program, provision of coaches and the SEMI enrichment program are well targeted and effective. Representatives from schools feed back to the district about their successes and concerns. The district monitors progress in schools by regular walk-throughs.

Criterion 5: Partnerships with parents and community

This area of the school's work needs improvement.

The school tries hard to include parents in their children's learning. The high number of bilingual staff, including the principal, ensures that most parents are able to communicate effectively with the school. The Family Resource Center on-site provides opportunities for parents to come in to school and take part in workshops to support student learning. A recent survey of parents about workshop types did not elicit much response. Teachers regularly make contact with individual parents to discuss progress and behavior in addition to the parent teacher consultations. Parents feel welcome in school at any time and feel that their concerns are usually addressed although there were requests about how to make further inquiries at a higher level.

The school does not yet systematically set individual targets for students that are then communicated to parents. Some teachers introduce these themselves. Where this happens, students make better progress as parents know how to help their children and assist in the teachers. There is a need for consistency in all classes to share best practice. Where there are difficulties there are 'Child Development' meetings to set an individual support program for each child. Parents report varied degrees of satisfaction with the special education support process for their children.

Parents receive good quality information about the school before their children start. The principal makes new parents welcome and greets new students personally. Monthly newsletters are sent in both English and Spanish. Teachers send out curriculum updates and information to the families to involve parents in

learning. This varies in quality and quantity. The school should give guidance to all staff to ensure effectiveness.

There are a variety of partnerships and links with the community but some of these are rather limited. Connecticut College students visit and are active in the school as are the Office of Volunteers for Community Service. In addition, the school has strong links with Mitchell College and Connecticut State Education Department. Parents strongly support the dual language program and the cultural diversity of the school. The district leads most external partnerships. The Centro do la Comunidad sponsors an after school program, to good effect, but overall there are insufficient opportunities for many students to attend after school programs.