



**CSDE**

**QUALITY REVIEW FINAL REPORT**

**Ansonia Public Schools**

# **Quality Review Report**

**Mead Elementary School**

**75 Ford Street  
Ansonia  
Connecticut  
06401**

**Principal: Terri Goldson**

**Dates of review: November 12 – 13, 2008**

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## 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:

Mead Elementary School has 620 students enrolled in grades 3 through 5. Student enrollment comprises 56 percent White, 21 percent Hispanic, 21 percent Black and small proportions of American Indian and Asian American students. Around 4 percent are English language learners who receive English as Second Language services. This is below the State average. There are too few English language learners in the school to count toward adequate yearly progress (AYP). The first language of the majority of these students is Spanish. The proportion of students with disabilities at 9 percent is around the State average. Approximately 60 percent of students are eligible for free and/or reduced price meals, which is above the State average. At 96.7 percent, attendance is around the State average.

The current principal and assistant principal have been in their positions for just over a year.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well:

- The strong and purposeful partnership of the principal and assistant principal gives the school a clear direction and sets high expectations for student academic and personal achievement.
- Student achievement and progress in math are good because learning is engaging, instruction is differentiated well and goals are clearly shared and understood so that students know for themselves how to improve.
- The school builds student personal development effectively through its promotion of “Respect.” Consequently, students behave well and most have positive attitudes to learning.
- A strong school team spirit is focused on improving student achievement and progress and so teachers work hard to meet student interests through a variety of activities, including field trips, project work and special events.
- The school welcomes parents as partners and provides good opportunities for them to come in to talk about their children’s achievements and progress.

### Areas for Improvement:

- Involve parents and staff in implementing a school improvement plan that details precisely how it will raise achievement in reading, ensure curriculum continuity within and across grades, and measure and monitor its progress against long term and benchmark goals.
- Give a clearer focus to the teaching of reading through the more effective use of assessment data, to ensure that teachers differentiate instruction in all classes to meet the learning needs of all individuals and student groups.
- Implement a curriculum that builds student skills and strategies systematically across grades and meets the diversity of student cultures.
- Create and implement a professional development plan that details how to improve the teaching expertise of individuals, especially in the teaching of reading.
- Develop the role and effectiveness of data teams at the building and instructional levels.

## Part 3: Main Findings

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

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

Staff, parents and students agree that Mead School is rapidly improving due to the focused, purposeful and determined leadership of the principal and assistant principal working in close partnership. They are both highly visible around the school. Consequently, everyone knows them and students approach them with work and to tell them about achievements of which they are proud. They have the full support of most staff members who have equally high expectations and strong commitment to student learning.

The school has worked incredibly hard to raise student achievement with a great deal of success in math and writing, and increasing success in reading. By using assessment data rigorously, planning learning that meets students' diverse needs and setting learning in real and practical contexts, achievement and progress in math and writing have accelerated. Writing is at the State average and math is above. The school is now on a mission to show that it can replicate its success and raise achievement in reading so that the school will meet AYP this year. The school has yet to record formally how it plans to improve achievement in reading in a detailed school improvement plan, and how it will involve staff and parents in the process so they can take ownership of their roles. Some teachers have not received effective training and support in the teaching of reading to help them match learning more effectively to student academic and cultural diversity. In addition, the district and school reading curriculum and assessment are in the early stages of development and so do not ensure student skills build systematically. The school has created data teams this year to support a more rigorous evaluation of the school's work, and to analyze assessment data more closely to inform decisions about instruction and curriculum planning. The school is in the process of establishing the data teams at building and instructional levels to develop more effective shared leadership throughout the school.

The school has successfully created school and classroom environments that are conducive to learning. Relationships between staff, students and parents are mostly positive and this supports student learning effectively. Students have high self confidence and self esteem because they know how well they are achieving. Teacher feedback and leveled rubrics give students clear knowledge of what they need to do to improve and reach even higher levels. Students relish the few formal opportunities given for them to show they can be trusted, to use their initiative and take responsibility for their learning and behavior. Most students behave well and their positive attitudes are reflected in good attendance. Teachers work hard to keep parents informed about their children's progress. As a result, a growing number of parents are getting more involved in the school's work.

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

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

The school has worked hard over the last year and a half to raise student achievement and successfully improve student progress in math and writing. Students make good progress in these subjects. Standards in both subjects have risen considerably over the last two years and now meet the State average at proficiency levels and higher. Student achievement in math is higher and meets goal. In 2008, the school met AYP in both subjects as measured by the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT). Standards in science are improving and are almost in line with State averages.

In reading, student achievement is rising each year and, in 2008, students in grade 4 met the State average. However, although satisfactory overall, student progress is too slow for them to catch up the lower achievement many have when they start at the school, especially students with special education

needs. None of the school's student subgroups met AYP in reading, including ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Although too few to count towards AYP, the school monitors the progress of individual English language learners in the same way it does for other students to ensure they make progress.

The school uses regular benchmark testing and formative assessments at the end of each cycle of learning to assess effectively individual student progress in the reading and math strands. This practice is embedded and more effective in math because it has been in place for over a year. The process has been introduced this year in reading. As a result, the school has a very clear picture of student achievement and progress in math and a developing one in reading. The school looks closely at individual student progress and identifies its "hot list" of students who need specific support to move up a level within a year. The targeted instruction for students on the math hot list, introduced last year, resulted in nearly all of those students reaching proficiency levels in the CMT. A "reading hotlist" has been introduced this year so the school can replicate the success it has had in math to the targeting of students' learning in reading. Teachers measure students' achievement and progress in writing against clearly leveled rubrics aligned to State standards. As a result, students and teachers know the precise levels reached and the skills and strategies students need to improve.

There is more work to do to analyze achievement and progress data for different subgroups so that the school can monitor more rigorously the progress of ethnic and gender groups, English language learners and students with special education needs as groups. The school does not know objectively why students with special education needs are not meeting AYP for math or reading and why some ethnic and gender groups are performing better in math and writing than reading. The school puts particularly good emphasis on the achievement and progress of its higher achievers and gifted and talented students. The administration and teachers expect these students to reach higher than the proficiency levels needed for AYP and so give them challenging work in lessons. The school analyzes the assessment data closely to make sure they reach the levels that they should to achieve goal or advanced levels in the CMT.

The school compares its achievement in CMT with its District Reference Group of schools. It knows it is performing better in math than most of the schools and that it is not doing as well as some in reading. It has not yet started to investigate why this is the case and so share its successful practices in math with other schools and learn from others' successful practices in reading.

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

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

Students say, "Teachers care that we learn and they do their best to make learning fun." They do this through a variety of ways, including project work to give learning relevance and interest, and planning field trips to motivate learning at the beginning of a unit or as a culmination of learning at the end. In this way, many teachers successfully motivate student enthusiasm for learning.

The quality of teaching in math is good. Teachers carry out regular formative assessments and use the data consistently well to match learning precisely to student need. Consequently, group tasks in all lessons target skills at different levels. This ensures that students who need more support to reach proficiency get the help they need, and higher achievers get the necessary challenge to reach goal or advanced levels. In addition, teachers think carefully in math how to ensure effective student learning. This results in some groups using manipulatives to help consolidate understanding, discussing which strategies to use to solve particular problems and receiving tutor support individually and in smaller groups. This good teaching is supported in grades 4 and 5 by the organization of teachers into subject teams so that they can teach to their subject strengths. Good teaching and more scheduled science and social studies classes are resulting in pleasing improvements to student achievement and progress in these subjects.

The quality of teaching in reading varies too much because teachers have different levels of subject knowledge and expertise and assessment systems are not yet fully embedded to guide teachers' planning. In the best classes, teachers use their own assessment data closely to match tasks and to target learning in small group instruction. Too often, lesson plans indicate that differentiation will be extra in-class support for struggling students, including students with special education needs and English language learners, while higher achievers will complete the same task independently. Tutors give good support in class to students who find reading more difficult, especially when they have worked closely with teachers to identify key questions and instructional strategies to promote students' learning. However, in less effective classes, teachers follow the program too rigidly. While they plan what they want students to learn, aligned to State standards, they do not always give enough thought to the best way that their students learn. Some teachers use too many identical worksheets. In others, too much time is spent going over homework answers or discussing test questions rather than teaching the skills and strategies arising from them that would improve achievement. Consequently, learning methods are too narrow to engage all students in these lessons.

All teachers have created learning environments that encourage student learning. Posters, rubrics and charts act as reminders to students during lessons. Rubrics in math, writing, social studies, science and more recently reading, give students the information and support they need to improve their work. Standards have risen in writing partly because of the good use of rubrics to guide learning and partly because all teachers, including unified arts teachers, plan regular and relevant opportunities for students to write in all subjects studied.

Professional development opportunities are not planned systematically to target individual teacher's skills and expertise. Good training in math and writing is resulting in good teaching in both subjects. Assessment data is not used sufficiently well to identify classes that teach specific reading strands particularly well and so inform the sharing of successful practices. The focus of professional development has been on attending district workshops rather than teachers learning from good and effective practitioners at Mead School.

### **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 has begun the process of aligning curriculum with State standards and has been successful in all subjects except English language arts. In math, the school has identified the power standards so that the math curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant and meets the needs of the students. Math problems are set within real contexts using real names to motivate students and to encourage them to have a go at solving the problem. The successes in math are directly attributable to the changes in how teachers and support staff are utilized, improvements to curriculum and instructional planning and the monitoring of instruction to ensure it is consistently effective.

The school has only just started to align the curriculum in reading to State standards. Consequently, it does not yet have a reading curriculum that builds skills systematically from one year to the next or strategies to differentiate learning more effectively. While this is ultimately a district responsibility, Mead School faculty can begin by replicating in reading the process that they followed in math. The faculty is not yet fully aware of the achievement levels of specific subgroups, including students with special education needs and ethnic minority students. As a result, the curriculum is not always carefully aligned to meet either their academic and cultural learning needs.

Students receive a broad, balanced curriculum overall. Specialist teaching in grades 4 and 5 enable students to receive good quality instruction in science and social studies. Teachers work closely together to ensure links between subjects add relevance to learning through relevant project work and field trips. Teachers plan suitable challenges in many classes other than reading to meet the needs of higher achievers. Homework generally consolidates or extends learning in class.

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

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

Every student asked could say without prompting that the word "Respect" displayed prominently in classrooms and hallways drives the school's positive climate. Students can explain clearly what it means to be respectful. Consequently, not only do most act respectfully in school, but also they say they learn to act respectfully towards their families when at home. Overall, students' behavior is good and almost all walk around the building with the minimum of supervision necessary. There are a small number of suspensions due to the inappropriate behavior of a few students. Relationships are mostly constructive and so most students take responsibility for their own behavior. Students and teachers generally speak respectfully to each other, although there are occasions when they do not.

Students enjoy coming to school and most have positive attitudes to learning. They rise to the high expectations for their behavior and academic achievement, knowing the importance of doing well in school. This has resulted in good achievement and progress in math. Students particularly like the additional activities like field trips and project work. They talk animatedly about the special days, such as the first day of school rally, the Christmas Extravaganza and Veterans' Assembly. As a result, it is not too difficult to get them to come to school and most do so every day and on time.

Students say they feel safe in school and know that if they need to talk about something, there is always an adult who will listen and help to sort out any concern. They are confident that teachers, the principal or assistant principal care about their feelings. Although there is no formal vehicle through which they can express their opinions such as a student government, students have informal opportunities to say what they think and to offer their viewpoint. When given the opportunity, students work well with a partner and in groups on a collaborative task. Every day, selected students make the morning announcements, giving some opportunity to take responsibility. Students have some opportunity to use their initiative but for most of the time adults direct their learning, behavior and conduct.

## **Criterion 5: School Climate**

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

The school has high expectations for students' good behavior and conduct, which it backs up with structured supports and procedures that are followed consistently by all staff. Staff supervise students closely when they are inside and outside the building. Nevertheless, students know and follow the school rules and rise to the school's high expectations for their personal achievements. Expectations for student academic achievement have been higher in the last two years. This is especially so in math where improving results have given teachers a renewed confidence to strive towards raising student achievement in reading. The daily message reinforces the school's high expectations for personal and academic success. The principal goes into all classrooms every morning and encourages students to do their best.

The school strives to build student self confidence and self esteem with some success. When issues arise, staff take the time to talk to students about their behavior and to guide them to do the right thing. Students like this approach and recognize that the principal and assistant principal are "reasonable" when giving consequences for misbehavior. The life skills program gives students good opportunity to reflect about social and moral issues, and to think carefully about the personal decisions that they make on an everyday basis. There are some opportunities for students to learn about the diverse cultures of students who attend the school and of people around the world through music and art. "Student of the Month" celebrates successfully student achievement in personal conduct and behavior.

Students have suitable opportunity to work collaboratively, especially on practical tasks in math and science. There are still some missed opportunities for them to work collaboratively in English language

arts and social studies, for example, through drama, debating or to solve a group problem. The school provides students with some opportunities to take responsibility and use their initiative through checking their own and each other's work against rubrics and by being responsible for their own behavior. There are, however, few formal policies in place to ensure this happens consistently and systematically in all classes.

The school monitors attendance and tardiness closely and analyzes any impact on student achievement. For example, after noticing that two students were not making the progress they should in math because they were missing the start of lessons every day through being late, the school is now checking to make sure they are getting to school on time every day.

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

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

The principal and assistant principal give good leadership and manage the school well. They have a clear vision and high expectations for student academic and personal achievement and the school's continued growth. These are shared by nearly all staff. The challenge is to get all staff on board and to convince everyone that the successes achieved in math and writing can be replicated in reading.

The principal and assistant principal monitor the impact of teaching on student learning very closely. They analyze assessment data, look at student work, talk to students about their achievements and visit classrooms on a regular basis. They are quick to note when agreed practices are not taking place and give gentle reminders to those teachers concerned. They both know each teacher's strengths and areas that they need to improve. The information has been used to deliver effective training and support for the teaching of math and writing. As yet, the information is not used effectively to plan differentiated training and support for improving teachers' expertise in the teaching of reading.

The decision to focus on math and writing last year was deliberate because the principal knew that the school had the expertise and drive to effect change and improvement quickly in these subjects. The structured approach has been effective. The school assesses student work rigorously and regularly, and subsequently sets very clear and objective goals for improvement. The principal and assistant principal look closely at data to decide which students are or are not making enough progress. They then plan targeted interventions to ensure that their needs are met more effectively. The leadership of curriculum and instructional planning in math is good. Monitoring procedures are rigorous and constantly check that what has been agreed is happening in all classes. The school knows it now needs to write down how it achieved turnaround in math and apply the same processes to reading. It has not yet formally recorded an improvement plan detailing how it plans to improve achievement and progress in reading because it is waiting for the outcome of the school and district reviews. As a result, goals for raising achievement in reading are not currently driving school improvement sufficiently well.

The school has started to implement data teams to build collaborative leadership across the school and to involve teachers in the analysis of assessment data. Its efforts are hampered by a lack of staff training and too little scheduled time for staff to meet and plan collaboratively. The school uses some of the faculty meeting time to try to establish the role of the data teams at the instructional level. There is limited budget to support more regular meetings at grade and subject department levels.

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

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

Mead School enjoys the support of its parent community. Parents identify administrators, faculty and staff as caring professionals who make time for them and their children. Parents say that they are particularly impressed with the willingness of teachers to meet with them on a regular basis to discuss student needs and progress. The school makes every attempt to communicate with parents beyond the traditional Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and assembly approaches; however, response to their efforts are not always successful. Sometimes attendance at events is disappointing. The school continues to utilize a variety of ways to get the message out including newsletters, flyers, the school website and e-mail so that parents are kept informed about the achievement and progress of their children. This involvement of the parents supports the achievement of their children and administrators and staff are delighted that a growing number of parents are getting involved in the work of the school. There is still work to do in this area, however. Parents indicate a satisfaction with the quality of information regarding their children's progress. Administrators have not yet included parents formally in identifying school improvement initiatives, but are investigating ways to make parents as partners in evaluating the effectiveness of its work and in creating its school improvement plan. Parents are kept fully informed of the services available for student personal and academic supports and their rights to select a school of their choice. This is difficult in reality however, because there is only one designated school for each grade in the Ansonia district.

The school has positive links with its community and is involved in many community ventures. For example, students from Ansonia High School act as mentors to their younger counterparts, to raise their aspirations and help them to build positive attitudes to school. The students talked very positively about how the "Respect" values relate to the wider community, not just home and school. Student contribution to community initiatives is successfully raising the profile of the school in the town.

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

### **This area needs improvement.**

The school has positive relationships with the district. The administration meets regularly with the director and assistant director and with the English language arts coach to discuss student achievement and progress. The assistant principal at Mead is also the math coach for the district and divides his time between both roles. As a result, the district has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and knows that reading is its key improvement priority. It does not yet have a clear enough plan as to how it will support the school in achieving AYP this year. After an unsettled period, the current Ansonia School District Administrative Team has been in place for less than two years and, although it has made the improvement of student learning a priority, not all school supports are fully established. For example, the curriculum is not yet fully developed for all areas of learning so teachers do not have all the support required for their planning and teaching in all subjects. The school administration is held accountable for raising student performance but this does not directly impact school improvement as the district does not provide the coherent, integrated strategies that are required.

The district does not have a system for the accurate collection and dissemination of both formative and summative data in a usable form to help the school to track student progress. This means that the school has to develop its own structures. The district does not yet have a professional development plan aligned with the identified needs of the school to help teachers build their knowledge and expertise to play a full role in the newly created data teams. Data collection, dissemination and use are areas for improvement at Mead that can only be achieved through district support. This will include addressing the issue of common planning time for teams to meet and targeted support for raising achievement in reading.