



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Seth Low Intermediate School

Intermediate School 096

**99 Avenue P
Brooklyn
NY 11204**

Principal: Barry Fein

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Reviewer: Stuart Satinet

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Seth Low Intermediate School is located in the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn. It has approximately 1230 students in grades 6 through 8 with a 9th grade special progress (SP) honors program. The school has a wide ethnic mix with about 30% Asian, 30% White, 20% Hispanic, 20% Black and less than 1% from other ethnic groups. About 14% of students are English Language Learners and about 14% are special education students. 100% of students are Title 1 eligible, which is very much higher than City and similar schools. The school has significantly better attendance figures (about 93%) than similar schools and also exceeds the average figures for City schools as a whole.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- A committed principal works hard to develop a school culture focused on the individual needs of students.
- Staff collaborate well to provide a wide range of opportunities for students across the curriculum.
- A range of successful programs supports those most in need of improvement and extends opportunities for high achieving students.
- A school achievement team is beginning to develop effective processes for analyzing data and extending the range of teaching strategies in the school.
- Portfolios of students' work are used successfully to show the progression and skill development of individual students.
- Positive support strategies and well-targeted interventions have achieved good levels of attendance.
- Effective guidance services provide regular support to students and encourage engagement.
- There is a positive culture supported by the majority of students that is seen in their enjoyment of learning and response to instruction.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the use of data to understand the performance and progress of groups of students.
- Develop whole-school target-setting so that there is a clear understanding of steps to be taken to achieve long-term goals.
- Develop individual and departmental target setting to increase the use of specific, measurable and time-referenced goals.
- Extend the range and consistency of strategies to differentiate instruction across the curriculum.
- Develop evaluation processes in the school so that teams of teachers consistently review the progress of students.
- Build leadership capacity within the school to implement key developments.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school with proficient features.

The school has served the community for more than 75 years. In recent years it has adjusted to the changing needs of the community and is providing a range of courses aimed at a wide ability range. The principal is firmly committed to fostering a feeling of “family” and stresses the importance of social as well as academic growth. Students generally feel secure in the school; attendance levels are high, there is a positive culture and there are good levels of student engagement. Although a range of data is gathered, it is not used consistently across the school to analyze the needs of students. Work has started to link data more firmly to the development of differentiated teaching strategies but processes to achieve this are not yet firmly established. The school has clear overall goals but these are not broken down into easily measurable stages to support planning. In recognition of these issues, the school has recently introduced changes which are laying the foundations for proficient practice in these areas.

How well the school meets New York City’s evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school’s work is undeveloped

The school gathers a range of data and often uses it successfully to consider the needs of individual students. Attendance data is regularly reviewed, social and academic data informs guidance discussions and test and progress data is shared with students and parents. Good use is made of portfolios to show the skill progression and development of individual students and teachers are encouraged to engage students in this process.

Although there is some proficient practice, data is not used consistently across the school. The main responsibility for record keeping lies with individual teachers and there are variations in practice. In spite of the fact that assessments are discussed, teachers do not meet systematically to consider what the data is revealing about the progress of groups.

School data is used effectively to assess the annual progress of grade levels but is not consistently reviewed to consider sub-groups. There is not a process for considering such issues as the relative progress of ethnic or gender groupings and the implications for instruction. The use of comparative data is undeveloped. However, those in most need of improvement are identified on an annual basis and additional resources are used effectively to try to increase literacy levels for special education students and English language learners. This involves small groups and enrichment activities.

The school has begun to work with Princeton Review materials to develop approaches to assessment and differentiation with the aim of achieving a more accurate alignment of instructional planning to students needs. A school achievement team has been established which is beginning to scrutinize data, consider patterns and encourage differentiation. This process has been successful in encouraging the sharing of teaching strategies across an inter-disciplinary group and is developing good practice in using data.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient

The school is successful in focusing on some key issues. It is seeking to develop confident lifelong learners and recognises the importance of literacy in achieving this goal. There is a clear focus on this area of development which is successfully shared across the school community through such strategies as “the skill of the week”. The key goals which are described in the Comprehensive Education Plan are reflected in the more detailed planning of each subject area. Although the overall aspirational goals are clear, these are not broken down into steps which describe how the school intends to achieve them over time.

Subject plans describe actions which will be taken but do not link them consistently to time-frames which could be used to evaluate progress. The plans, which successfully drive school activity, refer to overall data such as grade levels but are not consistently based on more detailed analysis of data which measures progress of individuals or groups. More detailed analysis does take place when considering the progress of those in most need of support. Students in this group are seen regularly by the guidance team, grades are discussed, study skills considered and support organised. The school achievement team has begun to analyze the progress of this group using a range of data and linking it to personal interviews with students. This creates a dialogue about the effectiveness of strategies which informs practice. Where data is used to define goals for individual students, teachers are successful in giving clear expectations about progress. However, practice is not yet consistent across the school and the experiences of students vary.

The school is largely effective in involving students in a range of activities which encourage achievement and extend horizons such as the Masters and Arts programs. Successes are celebrated and parents are involved through an active parents’ group.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school offers intensive support to students on basic skills and also has a range of programs to meet the needs of high achieving students, successfully aligning programs to meet particular needs. Some students are able to complete their first year of high school whilst at Seth Low through their involvement in the special progress (SP) program. Teachers are supported in aligning their curricular approaches to the needs of students through access to professional development and the use of additional programs such as Wilson training. Resources have been very effectively used to create small groups which allow a greater degree of individual instruction. The school has been successful in adjusting staffing and scheduling to meet changing needs. For example, an evaluation of social and behavioral issues led to the decision to employ more guidance counselors. The school is making progress in developing differentiated teaching but practice is not yet consistent and there are limited opportunities for best practice to be shared. Following

scrutiny of data, the school achievement group is considering the extension of peer inter-visitation opportunities as a means of developing a dialogue on successful strategies.

Classes are visited regularly by the principal and assistant principals and observations are used to identify effective instructional practice. There is considerable teacher autonomy which means that practice is not always consistent across subject areas but there are many good examples of students being actively engaged in their own learning which have been given recognition from outside the school. The students are given clear guidance about what is expected of them through rubrics and teacher guidance which has contributed to good levels of engagement. Students are involved in decision making and have taken part in a peer review committee which reviews incidents of unacceptable behavior. The school is structured to ensure that students are known well and, as a result, students are confident and recognise who they can contact to receive support and advice. Partly because of good levels of engagement and partly because of effective support and intervention, attendance has remained higher than City or similar schools.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal has an approach to hiring and supporting teachers which is based on the needs of the individual rather than a uniform program. New teachers shadow more experienced teachers and a "buddy" system operates. Good individualized support is given. The professional development program has been effective in tackling key issues related to data. Princeton Review assessment has been introduced to the school and this has been linked to professional development sessions which have been effective in raising levels of awareness about data use which is starting to have an impact. The professional development program for all teachers is based on an assessment of needs and is adapted during the year when issues arise. The Comprehensive Education Plan has a list of topics which have been identified as priorities for the year but these are not built into a planned program at the beginning of the year. The literacy coach and librarian liaise with teachers to provide relevant opportunities and a more proactive culture is developing linked to the school achievement team. Some professional development takes place in subject team meetings which are held monthly but there are time pressures and opportunities to share best practice are limited by this constraint.

The effective development of a school achievement team has emphasised the value of inter-disciplinary approaches and the need to consider student progress in teams. It has highlighted the value of sharing the leadership of school improvement across teams to carry forward key developments. The principal, who frequently observes teaching, has a commitment to empowering individual teachers which is recognised and valued. He provides strong leadership and the administration ensures that the school runs smoothly. Youth development issues are a significant part of the school's mission and the link with the local community based organisations such as the Federation of Italian-American Organizations has provided effective programs for developing student academic and social skills.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

The main focus in the school is on the monitoring of the individual progress of each student which is summarized at the reporting periods. Student progress is assessed against previous performance and is linked to annual test data. However, there is not a consistent system for setting short term learning targets for individual students based on item skills analysis and it is therefore difficult to gauge progress towards longer-term goals. Although school goals are clearly stated, plans do not identify the steps which will be taken to achieve the overall targets. Many of the goals represent long term or general aspirations for the skill development of students, which are not quantified. The main planning cycle takes place on an annual basis and plans are not regularly realigned during the year. Some useful analysis of data takes place when the Comprehensive Education Plan is drawn up where subjects analyze the status of student achievement and program effectiveness. However, the analysis of data is insufficiently shared across the school and it is rarely used to generate specific measurable targets for the year ahead.

Comparisons of progress are limited by the lack of a planning cycle which identifies review periods for discussing overall and group progress issues. Although discussions about comparative data are undeveloped there has been an increase in the sharing of ideas across the network of schools which is starting to identify good practice. Similarly, within the school, the school achievement team is acting as a catalyst for encouraging a dialogue which will impact on student performance through the development of good practice. Periodic assessments are starting to be used to consider the effectiveness of plans and processes and to inform the professional development program.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Seth Low Intermediate School (IS 096)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score	X		

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 	X		
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school* 	X		
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1	X		

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.	X		
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.	X		
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.	X		
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.	X		
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.	X		
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.	X		
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5	X		