



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**New Voices School of Academic and Creative Arts**

**Middle School 443**

**330 18th Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11215**

**Principal: Frank Giordano**

**Dates of review: February 12 - 13, 2007**

**Reviewer: Georgie Beasley**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

New Voices School for Academic and Creative Arts has about 420 students enrolled from grade 6 through 8. Many students come from across District 15 and Region 8. The school's population comprises 53% Hispanic students, 21% White students, 19% Black students and 7% students from Asian and other backgrounds. This means that there are more Hispanic, Black and White students and fewer Asian students than typically found in similar and other City schools. The proportion of English language learners is 4%, which is smaller than similar and City schools. Many students speak another language in addition to English, mostly Spanish. At 24%, the proportion of special education students is higher than similar and City schools. The school receives Title 1 funding because of the greater proportion than average eligible for a free lunch. At about 93%, attendance is typical of similar and City schools.

The school was created to foster 'Arts' education. It selects students each year who show a commitment and interest in music, dance, graphic design and or art. During interviews for places, the school selects students from a range of abilities and cultures. Grade 6 students receive a weekly lesson in all four disciplines, music, art, dance and graphic design, before electing one to major in during grades 7 and 8. All of these subjects are offered after school as electives for students in grades 7 and 8 who want to study more than their major subject.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal, supported effectively by his assistant principal, coaches and staff team, has established a clear vision for the school's work.
- The school places good emphasis on students' emotional development and so successfully builds students' self-confidence and self-esteem.
- The Arts program develops/promotes imagination and creativity and so students express themselves freely and produce some excellent work.
- Equal emphasis is given to personal and academic progress and so students are supportive of one another, have good social skills and respect each other.
- Communication systems are clear and so parents, staff and students are well informed about the school's and students' performance, and social and academic events.
- Effective systems for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing how well the school is doing are established and so staff are reflective about whether their teaching practices are meeting individual student's needs.
- Teachers work well together in teams to plan lessons that engage students, and ensure equal coverage of the curriculum and related skills.
- Professional development activities have resulted in improved instruction and learning.
- Partnerships with artists, theater teachers, consultants and parents enhance the work of the school.
- There are meaningful links between subjects and so lessons are interesting and learning purposeful.

### What the school needs to improve

- Use data more specifically to identify and compare the achievement of ethnic and gender groups in each grade in humanities, mathematics and science.
- Use the information from data analysis to set measurable goals for each grade and subject that align more precisely to the expected end of year performance and progress of different groups.
- Relate class, grade and subject goals to whole school goals that are measured against students' tracked progress in the humanities, mathematics and science.
- Use the data and identified as outlined above to contextualize discussions in team meetings.
- Extend the good systems for monitoring and tracking each cohort of students' progress in the humanities and mathematics to science.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school with some strengths.**

New Voices is a school where staff and students smile a lot because the focus on the Arts curriculum produces enjoyment through practical learning in which students have chosen to participate. Grade 6 students study all four Arts disciplines each week for a whole year and this gives them time to make informed choices as to which subject they would like to study in more depth in grades 7 and 8. Specialized knowledge in teaching results in students' stunning art and graphic design work and accomplished performances in music and dance. The school is now poised to build on its good work and establish procedures and systems that continue to build strengths across the curriculum and instruction.

Staff work effectively as a team to integrate learning into one meaningful whole. The school focuses on the individual and caters well for the range of interests as well as abilities. The school is constantly checking that individual students make the progress they should to reach grade standards and this helps those who need extra help to learn particularly well. The school's goals have enabled all of this to happen. However, as yet goals do not align closely to individual and groups of students' performance so the school is not clear as to whether some groups could make even faster progress. Although a start has been made, the focus and purpose for monitoring and evaluating progress in each class, grade and subject is not precisely targeted.

### 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 proficient.**

The school gathers and analyzes a range of test data and its own assessment information to gain a clear overview of students' performance year on year. It knows that it is performing better than similar schools. To raise performance and accelerate progress further, the school knows it needs more students to reach grade standards in the humanities, mathematics and science, especially in grade 8. The school has a clear picture of how well students from different ethnic groups and boys and girls are doing in each of these subjects. However, it does not use the information to gain an understanding of whether any cultural, language or gender issues are preventing better progress of some ethnic and gender groups.

The school gathers a suitable range of its own assessment data to identify gaps in students' knowledge and skills in all subjects and particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. It uses the information gained to make adjustments to the curriculum to make sure the missing elements are taught. Good focus is put on special education students and English language learners who benefit from good 'push in' small group and individual tutoring to help them access instruction and the curriculum. The school has introduced systems for tracking each cohort of students' progress in reading and writing, and to a lesser extent through portfolios of work in mathematics, social studies and the

Arts subjects. This enables the school to compare the performance and progress of students from class to class and grade to grade as they move through the school. A start has been made to introduce similar systems in science.

**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 uses its data to set measurable goals for its overall long-term success and identifies interim goals which help to check whether it is on track to reach them. In addition, each subject department and grade team uses data to set goals to raise the level of students’ achievement at the end of the year. However, these goals tend to outline what the school plans to do to reach the goals rather than identify goals with precise measures of students’ expected end of year performance. Goals in the school’s subject action plans have measures but these are not linked directly to grade goals or to the previous or expected end of year progress of individual and groups of students.

Good emphasis is given to students who need extra help to learn. Goals for special education students, English language learners and students who struggle to reach grade standards identify the small steps they need to take to make good progress. Goals are reviewed regularly to identify additional support and to adjust plans and programs.

Parents and students know that their general goal is for them to meet grade standards. In addition smaller step goals are identified based on information from the teachers’ regular assessments, for example from the writing rubrics, and shared with students, so they know how to improve their day to day skills. Parents are given good information about their children’s progress and school life through parent consultation evenings, informative progress reports, newsletters, the school magazine and through various communications organized by the parent co-coordinator. Parents welcome being able to come into school at any reasonable time to discuss issues with staff ‘who are always willing to listen and who act immediately’. This full partnership ensures all members of the school community are focused on improving personal and academic achievements equally.

The school has a strong drive for all students to do well. Therefore, goals focus on students’ learning and on them becoming confident young people with high levels of self-esteem who are ready, willing and able to take charge of their own learning.

**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 curriculum is carefully planned to make sure that students not only receive their entitlement but also experience a wide range of Arts programs and additional opportunities. In addition to regular lessons in at least one arts subject, every student receives gym, technology and science every week in addition to a daily humanities and mathematics lesson. Strong links are made across subjects and so learning is interesting, purposeful and relevant. Each unit of work has an accompanying rubric which guides

learning and assessment and helps the school to judge progress towards its goal for student success.

Various effective strategies are planned to ensure instruction meets the needs of all students at some time. The information from numerous assessments including looking at student work, conferencing to evaluate and set goals and evaluating student responses to gauge their level of thinking, is used to plan future lessons, identify support programs and additional resource needs. Good support in lessons from paraprofessionals and closely aligned instruction enables special education students, English language learners and those at risk of not meeting grade standards to make good progress. Students are engaged in lessons where teachers encourage students to talk about their ideas and to help each other to solve problems and learn new skills. This helps students to rehearse their thinking before setting out on a problem. In some lessons, questions are not always used quite so effectively to guide and differentiate instruction and teachers sometimes ask questions that impede students' ability to think for themselves. Writing is made interesting because the topic is always linked to another subject, especially social studies topics.

The school's budget, staffing and scheduling decisions are based on a close analysis of student performance and progress in each subject and on ensuring a wide curriculum. School and class libraries have been completely evaluated and supplemented to meet the academic needs and interests of lower achieving boys and so boys are more motivated to read. Staff are deployed according to their strengths. Close evaluation of students' personal and academic needs informs decisions about class organization each year.

All staff who work directly with students know their academic and personal needs well. The school builds learning particularly well on students' interests. Students are enabled to be creative and imaginative when producing work. Links with social studies themes ensure students have an astute insight into social issues. The student council representatives are fully involved in the decision making process, especially the student entertainment program and fund raising activities. Relationships are good and so students are keen to share good pieces of work or discuss any concerns with staff.

Attendance is a high priority of the school and any unexplained or high level of absence is chased up immediately. The school looks closely at data when evaluating individual student's progress looking to see if a pattern in absence is a contributory factor. Good attendance is celebrated and rewarded. The school continues to work hard with a small number of families whose children miss valuable instruction because they regularly do not get to school on time.

**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 with some strengths.**

The principal is very well respected by staff, parents and students who recognize the many changes and improvements he has initiated and implemented. He has good capacity to improve the school further. He takes staff and parents with him and so everyone strives to do the best for students. All members of the school community are clear about and so follow school procedures to ensure the school runs smoothly. The school magazine helps it celebrate its successes and keeps everyone informed about happenings and events.

The school uses data to select staff who supports the school's vision and are intent on making sure students do as well as they can both academically and personally. New teachers are given good support to ensure they embrace and follow the systems for planning and assessing instruction consistently.

The full and varied professional development program supports the school's and teachers' personal goals well. Regular visits from consultants and weekly team planning meetings are beneficial in helping teachers refine and improve their practice. Teachers gain new ideas and methods of teaching by watching each other and offering advice and support. Due to the school's positive culture, teachers reflect on their practice and are confident to ask for help about a particular student or to seek ideas to teach particular skills.

The principal, assistant principal and coaches visit classes regularly to check the quality of instruction and the effective delivery of programs. How data is used to support progress is a particular focus of observations, especially for those students with specific needs.

Teachers plan together in teams to ensure equal coverage of knowledge and skills, and activities that engage students' interests. Weekly meetings keep strong focus on instructional matters and so teachers reflect on how to make their instruction even more effective. Goals are agreed but not yet written down so they are not always kept to the forefront of planning discussions. Therefore, although the focus is on raising attainment and accelerating progress, they are not centered on particular groups of students beyond those who are not reaching the grade.

Visits to theaters, art galleries and museums, and from visiting teachers and artists support the school's vision for Arts education particularly well. Grade 6 students culminate their year's work with a theatrical production. They plan and organize costumes, lighting and stage directions alongside writing and rehearsing their own version of a Shakespeare play.

**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 proficient.**

The school effective working systems for checking the quality of all its work. Teams look very closely at goals and individual student's progress and performance across the humanities, mathematics and the Arts subjects and discuss openly and honestly how they can improve instruction to better match their needs. The intervention team in particular is knowledgeable about students who struggle and constantly strives to improve instruction to meet their needs and accelerate progress. Information from regular diagnostic assessments is used well to adjust plans, scheduling, resources and programs to further improve their effectiveness.

Goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan are measurable but are based on incremental increases in performance rather than linking precisely and specifically to individual and groups of students' expected outcomes. Goals are too general and so measures are not objective enough to help the school evaluate its success or to give specific enough focus to its alignment of monitoring and evaluation activities.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: New Voices School of Academic and Creative Arts (MS443)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	