



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Secondary School for Journalism

Middle School/High School 463

**237 7 Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11215**

Principal: Abbie Reif

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Secondary School for Journalism is a combined middle and high school for students from grade 6 through grade 12. The building, which is over a hundred years old, accommodates three schools in total. Since the school opened in September 2001 it has grown in size and now has an enrolment of 627 students. The school accomplished its first graduating class of senior high students in June 2006.

Over 78% of students are eligible for Title 1 funding, which is higher than the City average. Approximately 13% are special education students, with just under 4% in self-contained classes. The school serves an ethnically diverse population in which approximately 48% of students are Black, 41% Hispanic, 7% White and 4% Asian. Approximately 9% of students are English language learners most of whom enter the school with Spanish as their home tongue. Accelerating the acquisition of English by these students is one of the central challenges currently facing the school.

Attendance is usually around 86%, which is lower than the City average but close to the levels found in schools with a similar profile of students. There are almost twice as many girls in the school as boys.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is steadily building capacity for sustained improvement.
- The principal leads the school with vigor and determination and is well respected in the community.
- The staff are dedicated to the school, show respect for students and implement the curriculum effectively.
- The school has a thorough and well-established approach to data collection.
- The analysis of data astutely identifies the performance and progress of all students.
- Scheduling decisions clearly reflect the needs revealed by student data.
- The expectation of high academic achievement is regularly conveyed to parents and students.
- Leaders and staff have a clear focus on the major aspects of the school that need to improve.
- The school makes good use of support services and outside agencies to achieve its stated goals.
- Budgeting and staffing decisions are specifically based on the needs revealed by student data.

What the school needs to improve

- Sustain the focus on those students whose data indicates that they are underachieving.
- Increase, through peer observation and the sharing of good practice, the proportion of lessons that embrace effective differentiated instruction.
- Continue to look for and explore trends and anomalies in students' progress across classes and subjects.
- Devise strategies that will enable plans to be amended or adjusted more quickly in order to accomplish identified goals and targets.
- Identify with greater clarity and precision indicators of success.
- Encourage parents to become more active partners in contributing to their child's performance and progress.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The principal, supported by a team of dedicated professionals, has worked tirelessly to bring the school to where it is today. She is well respected in the community and has the capacity to make further improvements.

The school is skilled at analyzing data from external tests and combining this with other information about students' achievements. Trends and patterns in students' progress are explored to good effect. Data is used well to determine staffing needs and scheduling decisions. It also revealed the need for greater investments in modern technologies and, as result, a new computer laboratory has been installed.

The school is well staffed by a team of competent professionals. Teachers accept responsibility for improving instruction and student outcomes. However, opportunities to receive feedback on the quality of instruction or to observe good practice are limited.

A lot of consideration has been given to the current Comprehensive Education Plan and it is potentially an effective instrument for implementing change, driving up standards and generating meaningful data. However, not all targets have clear criteria to measure more precisely what has been successfully achieved.

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 well developed.

The school has a thorough and well-established approach to data collection. The principal has been meticulous in verifying the data contained in the annual school report and analyzing its constituent parts in relation to ethnic groups, English language learners and special education students. Further analyses of individual students, classrooms and grade levels have enhanced the school's understanding of progress, or lack of it. The data from external tests are appropriately supplemented by other data that the school gathers at regular intervals. Further analyses have provided the school with compelling information about students new to the school and differences in achievement between boys and girls.

Data is skillfully interpreted and disseminated to faculties so that all teachers are in full receipt of the information that is available from the extensive testing that takes place. Standardized scores are used as a benchmark from which the progress made by individual students can be established. The school looks for and explores trends and anomalies in students' progress across classes and subjects. The trend lines are already beginning to raise a number of interesting questions, for instance why certain students do not appear to be making the progress expected of them.

Teachers are becoming very adept at utilizing the data that is available from students' work. Work completed by students is routinely assessed, dated, and kept in a portfolio to

enable teachers to make judgements about progress over time. The school recognizes that it needs to sustain the focus on those students whose data indicates that they are underachieving.

The principal makes good use of the annual school report to compare and contrast how well it is performing in relation to other similar schools and City schools. These comparisons focus not only on the academic data contained in the report but also on behavioral aspects like attendance and suspensions.

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 proficient in setting goals for immediate and long-term improvement. The principal, through her leadership, defines the setting of goals. These are then validated collaboratively in conjunction with a team of teachers and parents. Although the goals set are demanding and objectively measurable, the school acknowledges that teachers could be more directly involved in defining the initial goals.

Faculties are generally competent in setting goals and targets for each student. Grade level meetings, which look at students’ performance and progress, provide the rationale for these goals. There are many examples of teachers reviewing portfolios of work and agreeing common gradings. This clearly makes the process of goal-setting much more credible.

The school pays close attention to students who are in most need of improvement and is energized by the aim to improve the progress of the English language learners and special education students. These are seen as the two groups of students in greatest need of improvement. The Comprehensive Education Plan rightly includes greater acquisition of reading and writing skills as key areas for development.

The school competently identifies students who are located close to the boundary between levels. These students are targeted for support in order for them to progress to the next level. However, not all students have a clear idea of precisely what they have to do in order to make this step change. The school is aware of the need to continually look for and explore trends and anomalies in students’ progress across classes and subjects.

The expectation of high academic achievement is regularly conveyed to parents and students. For example, the principal publishes an ‘honor roll’ six times a year based on the average grade point achieved by students. In spite of this the response and involvement of parents is minimal and few provide information that helps the school to modify or adjust its goals and targets.

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.

There is a consistent focus throughout the school on an interdisciplinary approach to comprehension skills, reading for meaning and understanding, and writing for particular audiences. This is reflected in hallways, classroom bulletin boards, and students' work.

Teachers are encouraged to gather evidence from 'accountable talk' and from synopses of what students state that they have learned during particular lessons. This sound practice is adhered to but is not always used to best effect. For example, students are, on occasion, allowed to produce one word answers without any real explanation, and teachers do not always elicit what each individual student has learned during the lesson.

Support teachers are used to good effect. For example, the literacy coach ensures that there is a focus in all subjects on reading comprehension and writing skills, since data revealed particular weaknesses in these areas. A mathematics coach has been instrumental in encouraging students to think more laterally when solving problems. The school has invested wisely in developing modern technologies and has further plans to enhance these facilities.

The school is constantly seeking ways of ensuring that time for instruction is used efficiently and effectively, for example reducing the need for excessive movement between classrooms. Instructional programs in the main engage students. However, the pace of work is sometimes too slow and teachers do not always provide students with the resources necessary to complete a task. In these situations, students can be noisy and disruptive. The school is aware of the need to increase, through peer observation and the sharing of good practice, the proportion of lessons that embrace effective differentiated instruction.

Staff show respect for students and implement the curriculum effectively. Students feel that the school is 'like a family' and that teachers are there to help and guide them. For example, if students are not making progress in an elective, every effort is made to find an alternative. Student attendance is not high and leads in a number of cases to discontinuities in instruction and underachievement. However, attendance is a high priority for the school and students are actively encouraged to attend, for example by the inducement of a reward.

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.

Leaders have a clear focus on the major aspects of the school that are in need of improvement. Through the high expectations of staff for student performance and progress, the school is able to build capacity to sustain further improvements.

Overall, professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data. For example, enabling staff to teach a wider range of electives; ensuring that all staff recognize the contribution that they can make to students' literacy skills; and equipping teachers to make better use of modern technologies. However, some staff state that too much development time is taken up with administrative procedures.

There have been only limited opportunities for the principal and her assistant to engage in a comprehensive review of classroom practice. This, coupled with only a small amount of interclass visitations, means that many staff have not had the opportunity to receive

constructive feedback on what is working well and what might be improved. Consequently the goal to implement differentiated instruction cannot, as yet, be properly evaluated. There are good examples of teamwork throughout the school, for example the evaluation of results and modifications to plans. However, the sharing of goals and results is not routinely practiced across all faculties.

The school is steadily building the capacity to improve its performance. At the heart of this is the determination of the principal whose personal commitment and leadership skills are widely respected. This desire to succeed underpins all that the school stands for.

The school makes good use of support services and outside agencies to achieve its stated goals. However, the school is aware of the need to encourage parents to become more active partners in contributing to their child's performance and progress.

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 is developing a culture in which self-review is enabling teachers to establish how well plans are being implemented and to what extent targets are being met. This is underpinned in most cases by frequent interim goals that serve as benchmarks for the school's performance. Teachers monitor the progress of students towards their individual goals effectively. The principal keeps a close watch on progress towards the overarching goals that she knows the school must achieve.

Diagnostic assessments are made after each marking period but these are not always used effectively to measure the progress of plans, goals and targets. Although comparison of students' progress within and across classrooms is well established, the school is aware of the need to identify with greater clarity and precision indicators of success. Appropriate changes have been made to the support provided by the academic intervention service from those originally conceived in the Comprehensive Education Plan. For example, where a student's progress wavers, intervention is triggered, with new goals set to bring that student back on course.

The school is not particularly 'smart' or agile in using interim outcomes to drive successive phases of goal setting. There is an awareness of the need to devise strategies that will enable plans to be amended or adjusted more expeditiously in order to achieve identified goals and targets. However, in its relatively short history the school has been proactive in a number of areas, for example in the way it instructs students without fluency in English and how it collects, organizes and interprets data. These and other positive measures provide a clear indication that the school is steadily building a capacity for sustained improvement.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Secondary School for Journalism (MS/HS 463)	∅	✓	+
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	