



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

High School for Legal Studies

High School 477

**850 Grand Street
Brooklyn,
NY11211**

Principal: Denise Morgan

Dates of review: April 19-20, 2007

Reviewer: Judith S. Tarlo

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Information about the school

The High School for Legal Studies is part of the 850 Grand Street Campus which houses three separate high schools. It serves students in grades 9-12. There is a recently opened courtroom for this school on the first floor and all three schools share the gymnasiums. The present register includes 811 students. The school offers law-related courses.

The school population is 55% Black, 41% Hispanic and 4.0 % White, Asian and other. Sixty six percent of students are eligible for Title I funding. Five percent of the students are English language learners and 5% percent are special education students. Average school attendance, including those absent long term, is 79.7% which is .03% greater than similar schools and 3% less than City schools.

The principal has been in position for two and a half years. Over the last five years, the school had four principals.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is well respected, conscientious, motivated and engaged in her own learning, enabling her to mobilize the school community to focus on student success.
- The principal and cabinet make good use of data to identify instructional and programming needs and create and implement strategic plans.
- Participation in supplemental professional development activities is encouraged, resulting in the growth of teachers' pedagogical and professional skills.
- Collaborative relations with City University (College Now), local politicians, and law firms have expanded learning opportunities for students.
- Collaborative team-teaching classes provide rich learning and supportive classroom environments for students.
- Students identified with the greatest need are given multiple opportunities for credit recovery that are seamlessly offered during the school day, extended day and in Saturday classes.
- Strong collaborative systems for student support benefit student progress.
- Parents and students see school staff as accessible, dedicated to helping students learn, and encouraging the belief in positive outcomes for all students.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve the consistency of instruction so that it actively engages all students in learning at the appropriate level of difficulty.
- Continue to deepen understanding and improve practice in differentiating classroom instruction.
- Use interim assessments more effectively and in a more timely way to provide a better match of work to student need.
- Create more opportunities for teachers to plan together and share instructional best practices.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

In the last two and a half years the principal has stabilized the High School for Legal Studies with consistent leadership and a message of high expectation for all. The school is brightly lit, welcoming, decorated with positive statements and posters and student artwork.

The school has rebuilt the founding program providing students with academic study rich in curricular and extracurricular law-related experiences. As a result, students are proud to attend this school and demonstrate a respect for established school rules and regulations. Collaborative team-teaching classes provide rich learning and supportive classroom environments for students.

Parents and students speak positively of the improvements in school life, such as improved school safety. Systems are in place that provide frequent feedback and outreach to parents about student attendance and performance. Staff members are available to students. Youth development and guidance services are comprehensive and well organized. Guidance counselors carefully maintain student inventories and planning documents. Graduation and post-secondary education is an expected component of each student's plan, providing a positive framework for individual short- and long-term goals.

The Cabinet works collaboratively to implement school goals. Teachers are positive in attitude, active in professional development and eager for opportunities to learn from each other. The principal is aware of the areas of continuing challenge for student achievement, such as greater differentiation and greater student engagement in learning.

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 data that is used to inform decisions about school goals and individual student progress. A school focus on reading comprehension and writing, and the creation of double period mathematics classes, has shown positive results in student achievement, especially in mathematics.

Teacher scholarship reports are used to define trends in student achievement for each class. School leaders make comparisons between class performance and teachers to understand student and teacher needs. Item analysis data from practice Regents examinations in mathematics, English language arts, and living environment are provided to teachers to promote greater alignment of instruction with student needs. Teacher-made materials, to provide customized homework assignments based on data are utilized in mathematics.

Efficient systems are used to analyze performance of subgroups of students and to identify and track the progress of targeted students. Binders rich with information for each identified child are maintained and utilized by staff. Guidance staff use data intensely to plan and monitor the progress of individual students. The English as a second language coordinator uses NYSESLAT data and assists subject area teachers working with English language learners. The school has developed effective models of collaborative team teaching by utilizing information from individual education plans effectively. As a result, the graduation rate at this school exceeds standards.

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 well developed.

Analyzing data to develop school wide and individual student plans and interventions is a collaborative process at the school. The principal and cabinet work closely to create and implement plans that best utilize data to identify instructional and programming needs. Data indicating that the law program has improved student attendance resulted in the creation of additional classes and programs. Data gathered from the Teacher Support Matrix is used to differentiate professional development plans.

Frequent analysis of data such as teacher scholarship reports, student report cards and attendance reports, allows school staff to provide assistance to students in greatest need. The principal meets individually with many students in greatest need and takes personal responsibility for them. Teachers are also assigned to individual targeted students. Teachers document their interactions with these students so that relevant information is shared among staff participants. This level of communication maximizes positive outcomes for students. Teachers and support staff participate in empowerment circles. The integration of guidance and instructional support provides a coherence of service increasing the school’s capacity to ensure the success of each student.

Credit accumulation and assessment results are used to create student intervention plans. Individual students are recommended for and placed on credit recovery programs. Students and parents receive interim teacher progress reports between report cards. These are used to set individual student achievement goals. The school community is aware of the goals that include respect, high expectations, graduation and post secondary plans for each student.

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’s curriculum is aligned with State and City standards. The law theme of the school is evident in curriculum and extracurricular activities. Decisions to revise the curriculum are made collaboratively and have recently included new courses in advanced placement calculus and United States History and business/entrepreneurship. The school is only one of three in New York City offering a program in computer forensics. The school has developed partnerships with law firms, City University and businesses to provide

opportunities for additional instruction, enrichment and internships that accelerate student learning.

As yet, the school has not sufficiently developed effective plans for differentiating instruction to maximize individual student learning. There is evidence of successful collaborative planning within subject departments, but this is not yet common practice across the school.

Staffing decisions are made to support the school's goals for improved student outcomes. For instance, when the need to rebuild the law program and enhance the use of technology in instruction was identified, the budget was used to hire an assistant principal for social studies and an experienced technology teacher. As a result, several instructional and technology use initiatives have begun.

Scheduling decisions are made to improve student outcomes, such as the assignment of teachers to mentor and follow up on the most struggling students in cohort 2007. A positive atmosphere of mutual respect exists in the school. Students identify and trust adults on the staff, particularly the Principal who they see as a stable and knowledgeable presence. Because she knows students individually they believe that they are cared for in school. Attendance is monitored several times daily. Results are shared with teachers, students and parents. Students who exhibit patterns of poor attendance are quickly identified and referred for intervention resulting in returning students to school.

Some instructional classes, particularly those that integrate technology in instruction and role-playing in law classes, engage students. Collaborative team-teaching classes provide a rich and inclusive learning environment. Inquiry based learning and activities that involved each student were evidenced in the business/mathematics class with students who were identified as weak in mathematics. Overall, however, the active engagement of students is not consistently practiced throughout the school. Greater rigor and differentiation to include all students needs to be developed.

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 well developed.

The principal is a strong leader providing much needed stability and focus on student progress. As a result of her understanding of data, she has effectively led decisions to develop day school and after-school programs, partnerships, the use of data by all staff and the use of technology in instruction. This has led to increased student progress in academic areas, particularly mathematics. Teachers, students and parents clearly understand the school goals of improved student performance in English language arts, mathematics and attendance.

The Principal is highly visible making her presence and expectations well known. She is knowledgeable about students and staff. She frequently observes classes formally and informally, at times modeling strategies for improving instruction in classrooms. Systems for student attendance, follow-up guidance intervention, academic intervention, professional development, and coherence in credit recovery programs are well organized, making them effective and easy to access. Staff members follow procedures and consistently report that their goals are to further the success of each student. The school runs smoothly on a day to day basis. All members of the staff are selected for their

expertise and commitment to use data and technology to improve student learning. Many staff members have roots in the community resulting in a deep appreciation of the school's goals.

Data-driven school goals define professional development needs. Data gathered from the Teacher Support Matrix is used to differentiate professional development plans. Training teachers to improve students' literacy skills to improve comprehension in content area classes has had a positive impact on student progress. Professional development has provided teachers with an understanding of cohort data and how disaggregated data that identifies individual students can be used in planning classroom instruction.

An assistant principal provides effective support and supervision of collaborative team teaching classes. Staff members collaborate to implement and review the progress of students in new courses of study such as in business/entrepreneurship mathematics. Guidance counselors have responsibility for each student for four years and get to know the students and their families well, contributing to student success. Services are enhanced by partnerships with specialist and community organizations and school-based programs such as peer mediation. Representatives of the guidance staff and teachers collaboratively devise appropriate support plans for individual students which are then monitored for effectiveness every two weeks and revised as necessary.

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 has been using diagnostic assessments in mathematics which resulted in the development of a new course of study for some students that began in mid year. The progress of these students is monitored regularly and course materials are adjusted accordingly. The school does not at present have sufficient resources to provide interim assessment data in English language arts. Assessments in other courses of study, including enrichment, are not used sufficiently accurately to match student needs.

The principal gathers and shares data with school leaders about individual student performance in different classes and uses this data to further her understanding of school and individual student goals. She compares teacher scholarship reports across content areas to inform professional development decisions and to make curriculum modifications. Teachers' annual professional goals are agreed, monitored and revised collaboratively with an assistant principal.

Periodic assessments such as class exams and mock Regents exams generate data that is used to measure success of targeted interventions for students. Some teachers, working collaboratively with school leaders, are modeling differentiated assignments based on data from interim assessments. Year-end Regents examination results are analyzed to refocus yearly instructional goals in subject areas. The principal and the cabinet regularly review the effectiveness of interventions and program decisions with the information that is available to them. Systems are not, however, sufficiently well established to create interim data reports and enable instructional decisions to be modified in a timely manner.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: High School for Legal Studies (HS 477)	∅	✓	+
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	