



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**Fire Department of New York High School for Fire
and Life Safety**

**High School 502
400 Pennsylvania Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11207**

Principal: Raymond Palmer

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Reviewer: Alvin Jeffs

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The FDNY High School for Fire and Life Safety serves a population of 297 students. Of these, 75% are Black and 24% Hispanic. While students can come from anywhere in the City, the majority are from East New York, Crown Heights, Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant.

The school opened three years ago and its first cohort of students will graduate in 2008. Within the school there are close to 16% special education students and 3% English language learners. The school is eligible for Title 1 funding with 67% of its students qualifying which is above the average for similar and City schools. Attendance rates are 80% which is below that of similar and City schools.

The FDNY High School for Fire and Life Safety was established in September 2004 with the express purposes of participating in the citywide effort to improve educational experiences of City youths and to further the Fire Department of New York's long-term diversification goals by offering ethnic minority high school students educational opportunities to prepare them for careers in the emergency services. The school is situated on the third floor of the building and accommodation is cramped.

This is a small Empowerment School. Empowerment Schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment Schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- There is a very high commitment from all staff, who recognize the need that all students have for emotional stability and to be valued.
- The school uses data well to identify student needs, attendance problems and trends within groups.
- This use of data and the strong staff commitment contribute to the prompt and effective action taken when students give cause for concern.
- The principal provides high quality leadership.
- The school's achievement team displays a cohesion that allows new procedures to be introduced throughout the school quickly and consistently.
- Teachers show a real interest in students and a strong emphasis on individual achievement.
- The partnership between the school and the New York Fire Department is a strong one which contributes to imaginative curriculum developments.
- Good professional development has ensured consistency in the introduction and application of new requirements for behaviour in classrooms and around the school.
- Students really value the respect and support they receive from staff who "treat us as people".
- The school runs smoothly and all staff and students are clear about day-to-day procedures.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that the school makes comparisons with similar schools and monitor trends over time to guarantee that the highest standards can be achieved.
- Review the balance of formal and informal data to ensure continuity and accurate communication and goal setting as the school continues to grow.
- Improve communication between school and home regarding developments and activities.
- Provide continued support to teachers in grouping students and differentiating activities to match the levels of achievement within the same class.
- Provide opportunities for inter-visitations so that good practice is spread.
- Improve low levels of attendance.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The school has been in existence for a little over three years, taking in a new grade of students each year. Only in September 2007 will it have the full four year high school population it is designated to cater to. Even then it will be a small school. The principal, staff and students see the small size as a definite advantage, allowing close contact and real friendships to develop.

The FDNY High School of Fire and Life Safety utilizes an innovative curriculum to motivate students by immersing them in the academic, physical and moral rigors of emergency response. The school has current and retired fire and emergency medical services personnel on the staff, who work as instructors and serve as mentors. The emphasis is on college and career preparation, and exposure to employment opportunities as fire-fighters and emergency medical technicians. This considerably enriches the school's learning environment.

The year-to-year development of the school has also meant that new staff have been hired on a regular basis. For this reason, the school has placed a strong emphasis on the professional development of staff in order to develop a school where ".stakeholders will work collaboratively to develop a positive learning community where all students will benefit from quality education in a healthy, safe and nurturing environment".

The school has used its empowerment status to look at ways in which students' learning needs can be identified and assessed in ways that are relevant to them as individuals. In addition, it sees itself as developing a new curriculum mix, combining essential study and vocational skills.

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 uses data well. In addition to the information provided by external examinations and skills development, such as the Princeton and Regents grade level data, it utilizes a good range of assessment instruments from classroom portfolios of work to start-of-year tests and profiles arising from its 'READ 180' program. With its current intake of students showing a significant proportion of students at level 1, the school regards age-related tests as of limited value. In an imaginative move it has given all students the grade 5 tests, identified areas of weakness and assisted students to overcome them. The outcome has been impressive. Over a six month period 75% of students, many of whom had little academic achievement in their background, made significant progress. This successful initiative will now be repeated using the grade 8 tests with older students.

This rigorous approach to assessment has had two major benefits. It has meant that staff quickly get to know where a student is, and, thus, where to go next, and it has provided a

realistic baseline for individual students so that work can build on existing skills and progress measured accurately.

Detailed data collection has also been very beneficial in responding promptly to those students with special educational learning needs. By collecting and analyzing past records with early school tests and sub-skill profiles, it has been relatively easy to match these learners to additional reading and mathematics programs. In a similar way, the attendance profiles of students on probation have been carefully monitored. The school is able to identify strengths and weaknesses within other sub-groups, such as the 28% of female students.

Although it has started some comparisons, the school does not have a clear idea of how its academic performance and attendance compare with similar schools. Because it has only just admitted its full complement of grade levels, the school has only been in a limited position to track trends over time.

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.

Data underlies most of the work carried out by the school and informs goal setting and planning. However, the size of the school, the exceptionally good knowledge of individual students on the part of all staff and the large size of some of the classes has meant that a significant amount of data has remained informal. All discussions contain a rich combination of numeric, observational and anecdotal data. This is used effectively by all staff to adapt work and identify potential problems but is not so easily used by the administration to monitor progress.

This detailed knowledge and understanding on the part of staff has been most beneficial in the early identification of students with learning and emotional problems. In both instances, staff have then been able to provide guidance and support programs promptly and appropriately. In this way the school is able to convey to students and their parents the nature of the road ahead, but, more importantly, how that road may be traveled. Discussions with parents contain details of test results, observations of classroom behavior and the views of staff who know the student best. This works well and students agree that all staff “know us as people”. However, some parents feel that more can be done to keep families informed of, for example, the FDNY course developments.

Although this powerful combination of formal and informal knowledge allows the development of work that is better matched and personal support that really helps, there is a danger that the informality of some data could put these aspects at risk as the school grows larger or as staff move on.

It is noticeable within lessons that the planning and groupings arise from the teachers’ very detailed knowledge of individual students. Friendship groups are used most productively for discussions and providing opinions, while skill development is usually undertaken in groups formed on the basis of achievement. In this way the quest for high achievement is regularly conveyed to students.

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 is an Empowerment School because it wishes to develop a new curriculum which mixes academic and vocational skills. Students and parents testify that they have identified FDNY High School for Fire and Life Safety because it will provide skills and qualifications for their children’s working lives. The partnership between the school and Fire Department of New York is already beginning to bear fruit, with students receiving high quality medical and safety training from first-class practitioners. This, together with the high standards of teaching in English and many other subjects, means that students are motivated and engaged in lessons. Students are also excited by the college opportunities offered to them.

The school has mobilized its budget to recruit high quality staff, who share the school’s values. The school is in the process of purchasing large numbers of laptops to ensure effective learning of technology skills. Scheduling is regularly reviewed and the leadership team is currently considering blocking English periods to allow for the development of both literature and literacy skills within the same lesson. This is a very relevant response to data that shows many students still at level 1 in English language arts. Despite good management of finance and schedules, there are some challenges posed by the limited space for general teaching, gym activities and technology.

Teachers inject pace and humor into their lessons and a strong emphasis on high achievement. All staff have excellent relationships with students. Most have well developed skills in using data to plan lessons, group students according to the level of achievement and set suitably challenging activities. The school’s self-evaluation recognizes that there is still work to be done in ensuring that all teachers develop this aspect of their teaching. Students are impressed by the commitment of staff. Increasingly staff are using lunch breaks and other times to be available for personal and academic discussions with individual students. It is, the students say, “more a family feeling”.

The school recognizes that attendance is low and uses its attendance teachers to encourage parents to support regular attendance. It continues to act promptly and to collect and analyze data, identifying patterns and taking practical action.

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 is well respected by students and staff. He has brought the school a long way in the first three years of its existence. To support him, he has a strong achievement team, which shares his vision and the emphasis on using all forms of data to ensure effective support for individual students. School recruitment also has this as a key criterion. It is a school with clear and consistent leadership, which runs smoothly and disseminates information from senior management to each faculty very quickly. It is also a school that runs smoothly and is a calm environment within which to learn.

Professional development takes place on a regular basis. This allows the school to develop consistency in, for example, behavior and classroom management techniques. It also ensures that procedures are the same for new as well as existing staff. Senior staff

also model good teaching and assessment procedures which are disseminated effectively through effective structures. The principal carries out regular observations, as do other senior staff and provide constructive feedback. The school does not yet have in place a system that allows colleagues to view and comment on each other's lessons in order to share good practice.

Teamwork is developing well. Apart from the very effective achievement team, the faculties meet regularly and provide a good basis for evaluative discussions relating to curriculum development and assessment data. They also act as a good sounding board for new initiatives, such as alterations in assessment procedures.

The school has been particularly successful in aligning a range of essential support services. A good example of this is the work carried out in partnership with the Center for Social and Emotional Education. From a situation where disrespect for staff was the norm three years ago, the school has moved to a position where students show a mature attitude to staff, visitors and peers. This has largely come about through a program of discussion with students. Above all the school has listened and learned.

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 developed a very good approach to planning. The Comprehensive Education Plan is detailed, it has clear leads for each action and is reviewed on a regular basis. There are fixed points in the year when the leadership team reviews the previous plan alongside the data provided by both external and internal tests and examinations. It is regarded very much as "a living document" and each faculty has the opportunity to contribute to the initial plan and assist in the mid-year review.

It is through this process, together with regular reviews of data, that the school has been able to identify the need for specific actions. Actions such as increasing the purchase of laptops, extending 'READ 180', introducing the grade 5 tests and sending key staff to the Wilson course training have all arisen from a documented need which has been discussed at all levels. The appointment of an additional English teacher in this current year and the likelihood of appointing extra mathematics staff next year arise from the dynamic planning process that is now securely in place.

The utilization of data, both formal and informal, allows the school to move forward with staff agreement. This is one of the many "effective partnerships" referenced in the school's mission statement. It is also one that effectively models the cooperation and striving for progress that lies at the heart of this school. However, the school has identified the need to become more systematic in its collection of data in order to make its cycle of planning, evaluating and reviewing more consistent.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: FDNY High School for Fire and Safety (HS 502)	∅	✓	+
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	