



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

South Shore High School

High School 515

**6565 Flatlands Ave
Brooklyn
NY 11236**

Principal: Ms Judy Henry

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Reviewer: Peter Lewis

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

South Shore High School is located in Brooklyn. It currently has slightly below 1800 students, and enrollment has been declining over the last three years. Almost 90% of students are Black, and this percentage is higher than both similar and City schools. Nine percent are Hispanic and the remainder are from other ethnic groups. Although attendance rates remain below those of City and similar schools, the school has introduced a number of strategies which have been successful in beginning to reverse the trend.

On her appointment, two years ago, the principal faced a range of major challenges. Staff operated in isolation, students with identified difficulties in their learning were effectively isolated and policies and expectations were not in place so that the concept of accountability was neither understood nor established. School safety was a major issue, and considerable time was spent in establishing a calm, safe and orderly environment from which the school could build a culture of high expectations.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has been successful in building a highly committed leadership team who share her vision of high expectations and 'No excuses'.
- Over a short time, the school has become a calm and well cared-for environment in which learning can take place.
- Great improvements have been made in securing school safety.
- Students feel valued and trust adults sufficiently to seek their help in academic or personal issues.
- Relationships in the school are good.
- Students demonstrate good attitudes to their learning.
- The improvements made over a short period of time, and the differences they have begun to make, demonstrate the clear potential for further improvement.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to build on the use of data to raise achievement across the curriculum, and particularly in English and mathematics.
- Increase the profile of writing so that it is a central component of all subjects across the curriculum.
- Improve teachers' use of data in differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students, sharing best practice across all departments.
- Simplify the school's development planning so that, within an annual cycle, an achievable number of goals is identified and they, and the progress made toward their achievement, are communicated to all staff, students and parents.
- Continue to improve attendance.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school with some proficient features.

Although South Shore High School is an undeveloped school overall it has nonetheless taken huge strides in the two years since the principal's appointment.

Staff in leadership positions demonstrate a strong commitment to the school and, led very well by the principal, have been at the forefront of beginning to bring about improvement for their students. The school's focus for development since the principal's appointment two years ago has rightly been placed on securing student safety, on building relationships and on establishing a climate in which learning can take place. In this it has achieved considerable success. The culture of the school is positive; students demonstrate a commitment to their work and respond very well to the challenges that, increasingly, are set.

Almost all leaders have good understanding of how well the school is doing and of those areas where improvement is required because of the effective use of test and other assessments in setting goals to improve student performance. There are indications that these are achieving success, for example in the improvement in mathematics scores and in the work undertaken to ensure that all students are able to sit external tests particularly in English and mathematics. In a similar way, a review of data enabled the school to identify the need to change the school day in order to provide a calmer start, as well as to capitalize upon the times at which students learn best. The school knows that it needs to focus more closely on the steps to further improve student achievement, and on its strategies for planning actions and monitoring their effectiveness. A real climate for learning has been established so that the school now presents as a safe and stimulating environment with good capacity for further improvement.

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.

Overall, the school is proficient in using its recently introduced systems for gathering and interpreting data. These are comprehensive and give school leaders an appropriate understanding of aspects of students' learning that are successful, and where improvement is required. Systems have recently been put in place to build the school's understanding of student achievement and to plan action to secure improvement. These have begun to make a difference to the school's ability to identify needs and respond to them appropriately. Use is made of test information in monitoring the progress that students make, so that the school is able to compare students' progress across grades, between subjects and in relation to similar schools. Information from State and Regents examinations, together with its own grading of students, enables the school to plan appropriate support for those students who are achieving at too low a level.

Although these systems enable the school to identify students who are under-performing, the school recognizes that there is a need to build teachers' understanding of and confidence in using data. Currently, this is too varied and limits the school's ability to respond to shortfalls in students' learning at a sufficiently early point.

While school tracking data shows some improvements in students' attainment over time, and from a low base, it also demonstrates that students with higher attainment on entry make progress at about the same rate as their peers. Differences between subjects have been identified and action put in place to address these. For example, the number of students sitting the English Regents was far too low and, to a degree, reflected a culture of low expectation. The number of students sitting the most recent tests has increased markedly, professional development has been introduced and, as a result, achievement has begun to improve.

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 undeveloped.

Following an extended period in which the school lacked sufficient data to enable it to set or track students' achievement, it has now put in place a wide range of assessment information that has begun to assist it in planning work for its students and in setting goals for their achievement. The goals that are set, particularly by the principal and instructional assistant principals in mathematics, social studies, special education and science are frequently challenging, particularly in relation to the very low starting points of most of the students when they entered the school. However, because these systems have been so recently introduced, there remains too wide a range in the effectiveness with which teachers use this information to set high expectations for their students and ensure rapid progress.

In the support for special education students, expectations are high, and instruction and content are pitched at the right level to meet students' needs. Individual education plans identify the small steps needed to ensure progress. Regular meetings involving teachers and support staff ensure a rapid response to emerging issues and the outcomes are reported to parents, ensuring their full involvement. As a result, parents feel that their children are well supported, and are full of praise for the degree to which staff are accessible should they have concerns.

Following the introduction of the school's agreed 'best practice' model, high expectations of work and engagement are seen in the best instruction. Because of inconsistencies in the use of assessment information, there remains too much variation in the degree to which teachers plan and set work which challenges all students. In a similar way writing, a key area for improvement, is also under-emphasized in the students' work in folders and on display. While some staff, for example in science, are developing excellent strategies for promoting students' writing through their subjects, systems to enable this good practice to be shared and consistently implemented are, at best, ad hoc.

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 undeveloped.

The school has made a good start in implementing systems to enable the curriculum to be planned and modified according to the needs of the students. A range of data has been built up which, when it is fully utilized by all staff, has the potential to help in planning instruction that is accessible to students and is effective in moving their learning forward. In the best instruction, teachers plan activities that are relevant to their students’ achievement, and which include clear steps towards the planned objectives. Recent initiatives, such as the collation of data comparing the results achieved by different teachers, have begun to be used in re-aligning instruction, such as in mathematics following a dip in the results for the mathematics B test last year. As yet, it is too early to identify particular gains that have accrued to students’ learning as a result of these initiatives. While comparisons of student performance across grades and subjects is increasingly making teachers accountable, the inconsistency with which instruction is planned according to student need limits the impact of this in day-to-day instruction. Resources to support the curriculum have been improved, but the lack of an accessible and focused plan for improvement, linked to budget decisions, hampers the school in evaluating the impact of decisions.

Since the appointment of the principal two years ago the school has worked hard, and with considerable success, to set high expectations in respect of relationships, student safety and attitudes to learning. Staff show respect for students, so providing a good model which is reflected in the majority of student behavior. The strong emphasis placed by the principal on securing academic success is reflected in the concentration which characterizes the work of the majority of students. They talk about instruction being ‘interesting’, even in those lessons which fail to challenge them fully, and the degree to which they are expected to work hard by many of their teachers. Attendance is a priority. The school has a range of well-understood systems in place to monitor attendance rates and to trigger action as appropriate. As a result, attendance has shown a steady improvement, although despite the school’s best efforts, the overall absence rate remains too high.

The principal has been perceptive in the way in which she has deployed staff in senior positions. One example of the degree to which this is beginning to have an impact is in the establishment, by the skilled assistant principal for science, of a campaign to increase science qualification through improving students’ lab time. This has already decreased the numbers who fail to qualify in this component while, at the same time, significantly increasing students’ motivation.

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, leadership team and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to securing improvement. There is a broad and effective range of partnerships with the outside community that have a positive impact on students’ progress. Almost all staff are selected for their expertise, as well as in relation to the contribution that they will be able to make to

identified improvements. Teamwork amongst senior leaders and within some departments is developing well on an informal level. The school recognizes the need to make more focused use of data to inform meetings and the actions that are planned.

Staff development opportunities are beginning to be drawn from the school's improving systems of evaluating the quality of its work with students. As yet, this professional development planning is at an early stage and, because it is not formally drawn from the analysis of performance data, nor linked to clear planning to secure improvement, its impact is inconsistent. For example, while many of the staff are using rubrics to guide student assessment, this is not consistent practice.

The principal has a very a clear understanding of the quality of instruction throughout the school. This is mirrored, particularly through mathematics, science, social studies and athletics, by the awareness demonstrated by the assistant principals for these areas. Information from learning walks, and both formal and informal observations of instruction, is fed back to staff at different levels through regularly scheduled meetings and is now, increasingly, compared with issues revealed by assessment data. Although the exemplification of strategies for improving differentiation in lessons has yet to be fully developed, demonstration lessons and peer observations have been particularly successful in establishing a greater consistency in lesson structure and content.

Since her appointment, the principal has established a well understood range of systems that enable the school to run smoothly. This provides clear structures and expectations within which students and staff can operate. More importantly, it has been one of the routes used by the principal in setting high expectations. That this has been successful is seen in the huge improvements in the tone of the school, in student engagement and staff commitment.

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

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

Although this aspect of the school's work is undeveloped, recent and rapid improvements that have begun to be implemented and used by staff at different levels demonstrate the capacity for continued and rapid growth.

Data is collected from a good range of assessments, including Regents and scholarship reports, which give leaders in the school an appropriate understanding of the aspects of its work that are strong, and those areas which require some improvement. Although this provides information that is used in building an understanding of student achievement, the school recognizes that its systems for measuring progress towards achieving its goals, or the factors that have influenced greater or reduced success, are limited and rely too much on opinion rather than real evaluation. Because of this, the school is generally only able to determine whether interventions have achieved their planned aim at the end of identified review periods. An example of this is the school's identification of the need to improve teachers' ability to use data, particularly in planning accurately to match a range of student needs through differentiated instruction. Although this is set down clearly as an aim, the school does not yet have a simple and accessible action plan for this area which defines the desired changes, how they will be identified, or the planned improvements in student learning that will accrue.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is broadly accurate in its identification of development needs and, to a lesser extent, of plans designed to address these but is not used as a working document. Because of this, staff at different levels do not have a good understanding of precisely what improvements are planned or of their part in securing success.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: South Shore High School (HS 515)	∅	✓	+
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		