



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Cobble Hill School of American Studies

Public School 519

347 Baltic Street, Brooklyn

NY 11201

Principal: Kenneth Cuthbert

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Reviewer: Terry Turner

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Cobble Hill School of American Studies is a high school for students from grades 9 through to 12. The school has experienced substantial changes in its nine-year history and the current principal and four assistant principals have been in post for a relatively short period of time. A thorough review has been undertaken of the school's current designation and plans to offer a wider range of courses to students in the future are well advanced.

The number of students currently enrolled is 794. Approximately 63% of the students are Black, 31% are Hispanic, 3% are White and 2% are Asian. A small number are from other ethnic groups. The school has 177 special education students of whom 78 are in self-contained classrooms. There are 20 English language learners, the majority of whom speak Spanish. The school receives Title 1 funding for 78% of its students, which is higher than that for similar schools and City schools.

Attendance has been considerably lower than that for similar schools and City schools for a number of years. The current attendance rate is approximately 76%. A substantial number of students are absent for extended periods of time.

The building is over a hundred years old and has not been adapted to suit the needs of older students for subjects such as physical education. Plans are in progress to refurbish the auditorium, which is currently unusable.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- A variety of data is used well to determine why students are not achieving their expected grade level.
- Good use has been made of a Comprehensive School Reform Grant to craft a vision statement and create further professional development opportunities.
- Focus groups within the school have produced a good faculty handbook that is used as a guide for making many school decisions.
- The school is challenging all students to aim higher and raise their level of expectation.
- Professional development decisions are guided by the need to promote learning opportunities and improve student outcomes.
- The school has made a substantial investment in computer technology to remedy identified deficiencies.
- Sensible scheduling decisions are raising student achievements, particularly in reading and writing skills.
- Appropriate adaptations are made to the curriculum in the light of students' needs.
- The principal and his assistants are developing sound strategies for improving the quality of instruction throughout the school.
- Good additional support is provided for those identified as being in greatest need.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all teachers actively engage students in their learning and accept responsibility for raising student outcomes.
- Continue to develop staff expertise in the analysis and interpretation of data and increase school-wide collaboration.
- Clearly identify staff who are responsible for implementing whole school plans and include precise timeframes with success criteria.
- Provide greater opportunities for parents, partners and the wider school community to be involved in improving the performance of students.
- Improve the level of attendance, particularly for those who are absent for extended periods of time.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The school deals well with the high proportion of students in special education classes and recognizes that low level of literacy skills impede students' progress in many curriculum areas. Intensive reading programs have been introduced and analyses of data indicate that they are beginning to have an impact. Important information on identifiable groups within the school is recorded and used to good effect. A worthwhile plan has been devised to guide the school towards its goals and targets but is not yet used effectively as a working document.

The school meets the emotional and academic needs of its students. Proficient use is made of departmental data to modify instruction and target support. Students in special education classes are assessed regularly to ensure that instruction is appropriate to their needs. Rewarding and discreet use is made of outside agencies in supporting the work of the school and high expectations are conveyed to all students. The school is endeavoring to raise the levels of attendance, which are currently very low.

Although the school provides an appropriate curriculum, its delivery is variable. Leaders are promoting and demonstrating instruction that will engage students more actively in the learning process. The principal is very calm and measured in all of his deliberations. He provides a good role model and has the vision and capacity to move the school forward into its next stage of development.

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 makes suitable use of quantitative data from external tests and from self-generated assessments. Regular departmental examinations provide teachers with a clear picture of the performance of each student, classroom and grade level. Scheduled cohort meetings provide teachers with opportunities to update their knowledge and understanding of students' progress

A thorough analysis has been undertaken of reading levels on entry. Data showed that for a high proportion of students the standards in reading were far too low. Two reading recovery programs are being used with this substantial number of students, with notable success. English language learners are also benefiting from these programs. There is a determination in the school that all of these students will move to the next level by the end of this school year.

Leaders generate useful information on other identifiable groups in the school and have, for example, established that boys are underachieving relative to girls in both English language arts and mathematics. There is an acute awareness that data can be used to measure elements of school life or aspects of performance that are not necessarily academic, for example, patterns of student absences, the high proportion of male suspensions and the imbalance of ethnic groups on the school council. A school talent show held earlier in the year revealed that over 90% of the participants were black. The school is sensibly exploring ways of encouraging wider participation in future events.

The school is proficient at evaluating its performance over time, for example in terms of the proportion of students who are being promoted to the next level within each grade. The school also attempts to compare its performance against that of similar schools, where appropriate measures exist.

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.

Teachers make proficient use of data to set goals for long-term improvement and most targets are objectively measurable. However, a number of targets are too imprecise or insufficiently demanding to secure short-term gains. There are also inconsistencies in the use of timeframes to determine whether, or to what extent, goals have been achieved.

The school is mindful of matching individual students’ targets to departmental targets. For example in English language arts, students who have not yet passed the Regents examination are successfully targeted and supported through a variety of programs. Extended time for study skills is enabling more students to achieve their grade level in mathematics. In science the increased emphasis on inquiry-based lessons is enabling teachers to determine with greater accuracy the performance and progress of students.

The school makes proficient use of data to support those in greatest need of improvement. For example, special education students are assessed at regular intervals to determine whether their needs are best met in self-contained classes, through collaborative teaching, or in a resource based environment. Well-conceived programs have enabled a significant number of students to make substantial gains in either academic progress or emotional stability.

The school conveys high expectations to all students. For example, special education students and English language learners are set challenging goals and targets in reading and writing skills. Students are encouraged to attend Saturday classes at New York University Law School and some increase their knowledge and understanding of American history through the Brooklyn Historical Society.

The school makes appropriate use of local support services. For example, teachers frequently meet with other professionals to review and revise students’ individual education plans. Parents/caregivers are encouraged to share and provide information on their child’s performance. However, many parents do not yet play an active role in improving the progress and performance of their children.

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.

Implementing a curriculum that best meets the needs of all students is a well-developed area of the school’s work. Well-conceived plans to produce a wider and more appropriate curriculum for students are ongoing.

There is a degree of inconsistency in teachers' accountability for improving instruction and student outcomes. Senior leaders are aware of the contrasting attitudes displayed by the same students in different classrooms. Leaders are beginning to address these issues through in-class support and targeted professional development.

The principal and leadership team are perceptive and discerning in ensuring that budgetary decisions relate directly to the needs revealed by student data. For example, support has been put into classrooms where data indicate that individual or groups of students are underachieving. A substantial investment has been made in suitable books and the recognition that students should have greater access to modern technologies has resulted in a considerable investment in computer hardware. These resources are beginning to enhance the learning experiences of many students.

The principal ensures that staff are recruited to the school according to the needs revealed by student data. For example support for students has been improved through access to both a learning mentor and a guidance counselor. Overall provision for students' academic needs and well-being are satisfactory but students comment on the variability in the support and encouragement that they receive from different teachers. Although the school pursues student absences swiftly and diligently, levels of attendance are inevitably having an adverse effect on overall standards.

Staff are deployed appropriately and efficiently. For example, a class that was judged to be making insufficient progress has recently been sub-divided, and department heads are given time to meet with counselors to determine student needs. Both of these decisions are producing favorable outcomes. The engagement of students in instructional programs is inconsistent. In most lessons students are highly motivated and challenged. However, in many other lessons students are given too few opportunities to actively engage in the learning process.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient with well-developed features.

The leadership team has produced a clear vision statement that puts students at the center of all policy decisions. Staff are recruited on the premise that they share this vision and the school's high expectations for students' performance. A well-conceived and recently produced faculty handbook is used to guide many school decisions.

A satisfactory program of staff development has been devised and is currently being implemented. For example in order to increase student motivation, a number of staff have been actively engaged in a form of 'expeditionary learning'. Early indications are positive although a thorough evaluation has yet to be conducted.

The principal and senior staff regularly observe classrooms and are discerning in their judgement of good instruction. They are perceptive in identifying strengths and areas for improvement and provide constructive feedback to teachers. There are opportunities for teachers to observe good practice although this activity is not widespread.

Departments meet frequently to discuss what is working well and what could be improved. For example, placing a greater emphasis on a balanced literacy methodology to improve

reading and writing skills, and encouraging students to describe the mathematical processes that lead to particular solutions.

The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Procedures are clear and well documented. The principal provides a good role model for students and is well regarded by them. Parents and staff are confident that he and the leadership team have the necessary skills and capacity to effect positive change.

The school has developed a number of partnerships that have broadened students' experience of life. Students benefit from a number of trips and excursions in school time, but not all staff are willing to engage in these activities. Parental involvement is limited and the school is endeavoring to encourage parents to become partners in educating their children.

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.

Regular meetings between groups of staff, such as the school leadership team, enable students' progress and achievements to be assessed. These meetings provide leaders with a view of how the school's goals and objectives are being implemented. The real value of the current plan has not yet been realized as it currently lacks diagnostic assessment of progress. Some targets like those relating to instruction are not sufficiently demanding and some timeframes are imprecise. There is also a lack of clarity with regard to identifying who is responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the plan.

The school is proficient in comparing student progress within and across classrooms. However, whilst most staff feel confident in analyzing quantitative data to make diagnostic assessments, they are less secure in interpreting qualitative data arising from such activities as conversations with students. It is recognized that further help may have to be sought if best use is to be made of all the data that are available. Teachers diligently revise plans or strategies as a result of information gained from periodic tests or homework.

The school is making reasonable progress in terms of using successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning to realign practices and resources. For example, students' accomplishments are assessed each marking period and adjustments in professional development and programs are made, where possible, to help staff achieve departmental and school-wide goals.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Cobble Hill School of American Studies (15K519)	∅	✓	+
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	