



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

West Brooklyn Community High School

Transfer School 529

**1053 41 Street
Brooklyn
NY 11219**

Principal: Liliana Polo

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Reviewer: Jeff Plumb

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

West Brooklyn Community High school is a new transfer school. Opened in September 2006, it is co-led by Good Shepherd Services and the New York Department of Education. It serves 150 students and is growing in numbers. Typically students have attended between two to four different high schools prior to being enrolled in this school. They enter under-credited and over age (16 – 20 years of age). The vast majority are multiple holdovers. There is a 3-cycle structure which allows students to earn a minimum of 18 credits per year. Students are expected to complete 44 credits and 5 Regents within 18 to 24 months and then graduate with a high school diploma. However, due to its inclusive ethos and admission of 23 students with 0 – 6 credits, that time period has been extended for them from 18 – 36 months. The overarching aim is for all of them to overcome what has gone wrong for them in their previous schools and to graduate.

Fifty nine percent of students are Hispanic, 23% Black, 15% White, 3% Asian and 0.6% other ethnic groups. There are no English language learners. Four percent of students have been identified as special education students. Attendance at 85% is better than that found typically in transfer schools. The school receives Title 1 funding for 81% of students, a figure typical for transfer schools.

It is an empowerment school, which means it has autonomy to make key decisions and freedom over how it uses its budget. It can purchase professional development from whatever source it chooses and can develop its own. It can network with whatever schools it chooses and benefits from less reporting and paperwork requirements than is typical of other City schools. As a design your own assessment school it has made a good start on the development of periodic assessments.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's vision and leadership are outstanding.
- The partnership between Good Shepherd Services and the New York City Department of Education is effective and services the needs of the students well.
- Periodic assessments are used effectively to track student progress and to inform planning to raise achievement.
- The three weekly benchmark assessments created by the school fit the rubrics exceptionally well.
- Good use is made of data to measure the performance of different ethnic groups.
- Academic results at the end of the first semester exceeded the goals set by the school.
- Students' attitudes to learning and behavior are far more positive than what they were in the schools they transferred from.
- Attendance for students is significantly better than what it was in the schools they have transferred from.
- The learning to work program is good and makes a valuable contribution to students' sense of self worth as well as equipping them with important work skills.
- Flexibility in curriculum planning enables students to gain credits in a range of exciting ways, for example through the Saturday school.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve the procedures for hiring new teachers.
- Ensure that the full range of data brought to the weekly school achievement team meeting is used to inform decisions and revise plans and goals.
- Establish a link with a similar transfer school to benchmark practice and achievement outcomes.
- Continue to develop more formal end of semester assessments to better measure student progress over time.
- Continue to improve attendance.
- Improve weak instruction in the school so that it matches the best and particularly to raise achievement in science.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

In a short space of time this new school has achieved considerable success under the leadership of a dynamic and inspirational principal. The majority of students, whom prior to enrollment in this school, frequently truanted and under achieved have made good progress. They have rapidly accrued credits, often from a low starting point. Achievement goals set for the first cycle were exceeded beyond all expectation. Student attendance is better than what it was in their previous schools because they are engaged with learning and they are eager to succeed and graduate with a high school diploma. The partnership between the Department of Education which focuses on students educational needs and Good Shepherd Services which focuses on their emotional and social needs is effective.

Because the quality review took place at such an early stage in the life of this school, systems are not yet fully established and it can only be evaluated as proficient. However, because of the positive impact of some systems and the clear shared sense of direction, capacity for further improvement is good. The school has systems in place to enable it to become a well developed school in the future. At the time of the review the administration had not had sufficient time to establish a thorough and detailed data base to manage and effect change for improvement. However, in respect of the design your own periodic assessments it has made good progress. Although recognized by the principal, not all instruction is yet at a good standard, with a particular weakness in science. In addition, the school leaders are not yet sufficiently confident in the analysis of all pieces of data as they impact on specific issues in need of 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.

A satisfactory range of quantifiable and soft data is gathered and generated to draw up a detailed picture on the performance of each student. The school uses this data well to track student progress over time. Particularly effective use is made of three weekly benchmark tests to monitor students' performance. It is used well to inform planning to raise their achievement. Data is used to compare the performance of different classes and to inform decisive actions in respect of a class which underperforms. There is not a grade structure within the school.

Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with ethnic groups. Through observations the principal has discovered that African Caribbean boys do not achieve as well as other groups. It is too early in the school's life to know whether there is a serious instructional issue which contributes to this, especially as this group of students enters the school with fewer credits and Regents examinations under their belt than other groups of students. No English language learners are enrolled. The school is at an early stage of gathering data about the performance of special education students. Its efforts

are made difficult by the challenges it experiences in accessing the individual education plans on the special education students it admits. However, it has done a very good job on gathering data about students mental health needs and uses it exceptionally well to raise their achievement. Already the school has recognized that girls outperform boys and has taken robust action to accelerate learning for boys.

As a new school it cannot compare its present performance against past performance, and there is no similar school in Brooklyn. It is looking to partner with a school in Boston. As of yet comparisons of performance across subjects has not been made. Good work, though, is done scrutinizing performance within particular subjects.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The long-term goals are set collaboratively. These goals are end of year goals. Interim goals along the way to facilitate their achievement are not yet integral to them. However, effective periodic assessments designed by the school are used effectively to realign the rubrics for English language arts and mathematics to raise student achievement. There are immediate goals with clear timelines. For example, following data gathered through lesson observations by the principal the science teacher has an immediate goal of submitting weekly plans to improve the quality of service for students in this subject.

Following the first cycle of test results the school achievement team met to analyze the effectiveness of the benchmark assessments used during that cycle. Using data gathered they revised the periodic assessments. Consequently, assessments are now more effectively built into lesson plans. Lesson by lesson these assessments are used to refine planning to raise the achievement of individual students. All students in this school are vulnerable. The most vulnerable students are those who entered the school with 0 to 6 credits and the school works very hard to maintain their engagement. Currently this group earns the most credits.

High expectations are conveyed to parents, caregivers and students during the orientation period upon entry to the school. During this induction period parents and students are involved in setting achievement goals. However, once students are settled the school does not find it easy to sustain parental involvement in the education of their children. The overarching goal which drives all members of the school’s community is to ensure that as many students as possible graduate from high school with a meaningful post secondary plan. It is too early to evaluate its performance in this area.

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 curriculum is set up to generate data to monitor students’ progress towards success in gaining knowledge required in the Regents examinations. It is designed to generate data to inform planning to raise their achievement in developing critical skills required for

college and the place of work. Students' skills and levels on entry are fed into the planning to meet their needs. The principal has robust systems for holding teachers accountable. They are expected to submit their unit plans at the start of every cycle. In addition, the principal collects their weekly lesson plans. This enables her to know as to whether or not the teachers are differentiating their instruction to meet students' needs. However, compliance on the part of all teachers to this system proves challenging.

Data based on student needs is used very effectively to shape budget decisions. Laptops have been purchased to raise achievement in information technology. Funding has been allocated for an extensive tutoring program and a Saturday school to accelerate students learning. Staffing and scheduling decisions based on data about students needs have been made and benefited students. A teacher has been allocated to service the needs of special education students. As far as possible subject teachers have been allocated common preparation times to meet. They use these times effectively to plan together to raise student achievement. Creative thinking has gone into scheduling the school day to increase attendance at these meetings.

Instructional programs vary in consistency. Some lessons such as mathematics excite students and engage them in learning. Clear and shared objectives, brisk pace, investigative activities and involvement of students in assessing their own learning are typical of such lessons. Students say, 'We love our social justice class and the learning to work program is great because we get paid'. However, some instruction such as science fails to engage students. In such lessons the pace of learning lacks vitality.

Students say they enjoy school and, compared to their experiences in previous schools, they have positive attitudes to learning. They feel safe at school and trust all staff, especially their advocate counselors. They can tell them about any problems they have. Their attendance is significantly better than what it was in their previous high schools. Procedures to follow up absence are robust and attendance is steadily rising. However, the school recognizes the importance of improving attendance further.

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 very highly respected by all students and staff. All stakeholders in the school community see her as a person who cares passionately that they succeed and that she listens to them. She is a very effective leader and communicator. She has successfully put systems in place to raise student achievement. Consequently the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis.

In setting the school up attention was not paid to how candidates who applied for a teaching position could use data. However, a hiring committee is now in place to evaluate prospective candidates who have an understanding of how study units and sample lessons dovetail with periodic assessments. It is too early to evaluate its impact. Professional development is linked to the development of design your own periodic assessments. This has impacted very positively because a good system of benchmark checks is in place so that the principal knows where each student is with his or her learning and what needs to be done to accelerate that learning. The principal observes lessons frequently and gives feedback to teachers about how they can improve instructional practice. For example, as a result of such observations the teaching of

science has been identified as an area for concern and robust improvement targets have been set. However, her observations do not always focus sharply enough on the connection between teaching and learning. There is an effective model of peer observations for modeling and sharing good practice.

The student achievement team meets twice weekly to discuss the progress of individual students. Although it brings a wealth of data to the table it does not always examine carefully how the different pieces of data inform the total picture. The facilitation of the data scrutiny model is in place but it is not sufficiently robust.

Partnerships with outside bodies are used outstandingly well to support students in achieving their academic goals. The partnership with Good Shepherd Services is excellent and ensures effective co-leadership of the school. The arrangement with the learning to work partners is of enormous benefit to the development of students work related skills.

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.

As a brand new school there is not a Comprehensive Education Plan with interim goals. However, the school makes frequent and regular use of three weekly assessments to monitor student progress. These periodic assessments are used to revise instructional practice and to re-align student achievement goals. Based on feedback from students during the school's first semester a radical change has been made to these assessments. Comparisons with students across schools are not made and there is not a traditional class structure. However, data has been used to identify individual students who struggle with English language arts and mathematics. In the case of English language arts students are pulled out for one on one support and in mathematics a discrete mathematics skills class has been formed to support them.

Shaping suitable periodic assessments is an ongoing development for the critical thinking principal in this school. Nonetheless she has achieved much in this area in a short space of time. Assessments are integral to the rubrics and are used effectively to measure students' progress within the rubrics. The next challenge is to get more formal end of semester assessments in place. Agility and flexibility in the context of maximizing opportunities for students lies at the heart of this school. However, it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of agile and flexible realignment of student goals based on student performance data from the findings of the first cycle.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: West Brooklyn Community High School (TS 529)	∅	✓	+
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	