



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**The High School for Youth and Community
Development**

**High School 537
911 Flatbush Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11226**

Principal: Mary Prendergast

Dates of review: May 8 - 9, 2007

Reviewer: Paul Cosway

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The High School for Youth and Community Development is a recently established school, in its third year, with 317 students from grade 9 through 11. It will eventually educate students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school's intake is ethnically diverse, including 87% Black, 9% Hispanic and 4% White or students from other ethnic backgrounds. There are slightly more special education students than in similar and City schools. The proportion of students entitled to Title 1 funding, at 73%, is higher than in City schools and above the average for similar schools. Approximately 6% of students are English language learners and this is below the average for similar and City schools. The number of recent immigrants is slightly lower than in most City schools. Student attendance, at 82%, is slightly below that in similar and City schools.

The school aims to harness the principles of youth development and community engagement to promote the academic development of its students. It seeks to prepare students to take greater control of their lives and their learning by giving them significant opportunities to exercise leadership, to collaborate with adults and students and to make decisions. This emphasis on independence in their learning, as well as a strong sense of community, is intended to deepen their understanding of the school community and the subjects they learn.

This is an 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 clear vision for the development of the school, driven by data, which has resulted in changes to the curriculum to make it increasingly effective.
- The school is succeeding in its aims of preparing students to take their place in the community and they are confident that they have an important voice in the school.
- The principal has a good understanding of the usefulness of data and is using it to monitor and review the work of the school.
- Data is used well to identify which students need additional support and there is an effective range of interventions.
- The principal is an effective leader, respected by staff, students and parents.
- The students have positive attitudes towards school, value what it offers them and respect their teachers.
- There is a good atmosphere for learning in most classes as evidenced by students who are well-behaved, listen attentively and most make good progress.
- There are sound systems for teachers to share and benefit from each other's planning and teaching strategies.
- Students feel safe, trust their teachers and feel that there is always an adult they can turn to for help.
- Teachers use data as part of an holistic understanding of their students to help and guide them when they fall behind.

What the school needs to improve

- Analyze data by gender and ethnicity to get a comprehensive view of how effective the school is in raising the achievement of different groups of students.
- Increase the use of interim reviews of students' progress to revise and modify plans and goals.
- Improve the effectiveness of instruction by improving teachers' skills at using data to help them to adapt work to meet the needs of all learners in the same class.
- Compare past data and with similar schools data to help to measure effectiveness.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The school makes use of data and realizes its importance in all aspects of the school's work. The principal uses the available data well to lead the monitoring and review of the school's effectiveness. The school has made use of the designated period assessment materials to generate data and used these to monitor and support students' progress. These were found to be of limited usefulness. However, the school uses its own periodic assessments effectively. For example, when assessment data showed that some boys were underperforming in math, the principal split boys and girls into different classes. This has been successful as boys are now achieving much better results and are making up lost ground. The necessary systems and structures are in place to enable the school to further develop and to continue to improve its students' results. However, as the principal has identified there are some weaknesses in the systems. The school does not track progress by ethnicity or gender. Interim reviews, driven by data, are not part of everyone's regular practice.

There are good systems for monitoring and supporting special education students. However, when the higher achieving students fall behind, they are not always identified early enough. This is also true in lessons, because not all teachers are ensuring that the work they plan meets the needs of all the students in their class. There are good opportunities for students to take responsibility in school and join in decision making. The student government is active and all students know that their views matter. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and many of the points for improvement match those identified by the school.

Students and their parents are supportive of their school. The students respect their teachers and most behave well in lessons. Some wear their uniform with pride and most concentrate and work hard, but a minority lacks motivation and this affects their progress. The school has made a sound start and is aiming for 80% of its first class to graduate in June 2008. Teachers praise the support and leadership of the principal, whose vision and clear direction have been the key to the school's successful start. They have professional development opportunities based on the needs of the school, identified by data, as well as their individual needs. Teaching is most effective when it is directed at the individual needs of pupils, based on an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses, and some teachers are not doing this in their classes. Student lateness, absence, literacy problems and reluctance to wear uniform are all barriers to learning that affect students' progress.

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 good range of formal and informal systems is used to gather data on students' academic and personal development. The school uses its own, regular tests as well as State tests to

measure the progress made by individuals, classes and grades. Because the school has not yet had a group go through to grade 12, it cannot yet be certain of its effectiveness, but teachers meet regularly to discuss students' performance.

The school does not analyze assessment data by ethnic groupings. Because, historically, all students enrolled came from one ethnic group, it thought this unnecessary. However, the school has grown and there are now enough students from other ethnic groups to make this analysis worthwhile. Nor does the school monitor progress by gender. It does track carefully the progress of special education students and English language learners, and uses this data well to support their learning. The groups of special interest to the school are students from mixed grades who have been selected as in need of social and emotional development. Many students have problems in literacy. Their progress is being monitored closely and interventions are arranged to support them where necessary.

There is little similar school data that the school can use for comparison. It uses all the data it has, but this aspect is undeveloped. It has access to literacy scores from some other schools and its analysis of this indicates that its students are making relatively good progress. The school makes comparisons with its own past performance, although this is not well developed because there is limited data for this at present. It also compares progress and performance among students, grade levels, subject areas and those students who are identified by staff as being in danger of falling behind.

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 school leadership team meets regularly to set goals for the coming year and monitors progress towards them. The staff and principal meet in grade and subject teams to review their work and to set new goals, when necessary, based on data. This is focused on each student, classroom and grade level and results in new goals are being set with plans to reach those goals. For example, where data shows that students are underperforming, teachers set short-term targets of a 15% improvement and their progress towards this is monitored. Following review, new targets are set.

Where particular students are causing concern because assessment data and staff's informal monitoring show underperformance, relevant staff meet. They discuss the possible reasons for the problems, considering academic data as well as all they know of the students' backgrounds, and draw up a meaningful plan of action. This is reviewed regularly and revised. This holistic approach is effective and leads to improved results.

Parents and students are aware of the school's high expectations. All staff know of their accountability for student performance and are driven to greater efforts, understanding the high expectations that the school, students and parents have of them. Parents and caregivers are invited into the school on a number of occasions during the year and receive regular progress reports. The teachers discuss progress with them and make clear the steps needed for the student to reach the next level.

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 takes full account of the need to prepare the students for the mandatory tests that they take. Regular tests check on students’ progress. The curriculum is organized so that mock Regents exams can be set regularly. In addition, the teachers in charge of subjects, such as science, have the freedom to choose the materials, the order in which they tackle them and the amount of time they give to each aspect they use to help students learn. In the living environment class, for example, the teacher increased the time given to the study of global warming because the students were responding well to the subject and tests showed that they were learning valuable skills they could use elsewhere in the curriculum.

Data is used to monitor the performance of each class and each teacher. Issues lead to a swift meeting with the teacher concerned and a plan for professional development is created. All teachers understand that they are accountable for their students’ progress, but not all are modifying their teaching to ensure that groups of students are given appropriately challenging work. In some classes, teachers have support systems in place to help weaker students, but concentration on them means that higher achieving students are not always extended in their learning.

Budget decisions relate to the priorities arising from the study of data. For example, new text books were purchased for United States history when it was shown that simpler texts were needed if students were to improve their grades. Staff are appointed and assigned to meet the identified needs of students and the schedules are adjusted when appropriate to improve the effectiveness of the curriculum. Two accelerated mathematics A classes were formed based on the outcomes of diagnostic tests.

Most students are motivated by the teaching, although some do not to get to class on time or to give 100% effort. Any absences are followed up swiftly, but attendance is slowly dropping and this is becoming an issue for the school. Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs well. The students speak highly of the staff and know that they have their best interests at heart. The students interviewed agreed unanimously that they can trust the adults on the staff for academic and personal advice and this is a well-developed aspect of the school.

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 school is in its third year and the principal has chosen her staff carefully to ensure that they are in tune with its aims and have high expectations, based on a clear understanding of assessment data. They have to demonstrate that they love their subject and care for students and show that they are able to analyze the outcomes of assessment. Student, class, grade and teacher performance are monitored carefully and compared. Any discrepancies are followed up quickly by the principal and remedial action is taken. This involves appropriate professional development or the hiring of additional staff with the necessary expertise to help students to meet their goals. Professional development

meetings every Monday are effective in helping to raise standards of teaching. Some of this time has to be used for administrative matters, but there are opportunities for teachers to observe each other and to discuss their work in grade and subject teams, learning from each other's successes and failures. The aims of the school, as well as the outcomes of the data monitoring, drive the professional development priorities. These are matched to the needs of individual teachers when possible, helping them to raise student performance. For example, a mathematics teacher was able to attend a national conference that helped him to become even more effective in the classroom.

The principal visits classes to monitor teaching and learning. There are regular formal visits and very many informal learning walks. The frequency of these for any single teacher will relate to what is revealed by student performance data. Teachers meet in teams to discuss test results. They analyze these, looking for patterns, and where weaknesses are identified seek to modify teaching methods accordingly.

The Principal is respected and under her management the school generally runs smoothly. Outside agencies are used well to support students. Partner organizations such as the Brooklyn Center Initiative provide critical therapeutic services for students. The Brooklyn College Community Partnership enhances the after-school program and has led to comprehensive academic support center in the library that includes tutoring, research skills and counseling. These links are very effective and a well-developed aspect of the school.

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.

School planning, including the Comprehensive Education Plan, has clear goals and these are regularly visited by the principal, the leadership team and teaching teams to measure the school's performance. Interim results are analyzed carefully to detect trends and where there is evidence of underperformance, swift action is taken. It is too early to judge the full effectiveness of these interventions as the school has not yet had a group of students go through to graduation.

Comparisons are made of the relative effectiveness of classroom teachers. The results of their students are analyzed by class and low performance is investigated and remedial action taken. The school also tracks cohorts as they move through the school. The principal interviews all staff and uses data as a central focus in these professional dialogues at least annually and more frequently if there are concerns. The information that comes out of these interviews, along with the data, results in plans being immediately revised to try to ensure that teaching is as effective as possible. The extensive revision of the ways that literacy is taught is an example of this, as is the rescheduling in mathematics to form single-gender classes. There is minimal data across schools, but there are firm plans to make good use of this once it is available. The use of interim data to monitor the school's effectiveness is established at a whole school level, but it is not yet part of every faculty or subject teacher's work. This aspect is undeveloped in the school. The principal is aware that teachers make insufficient use of data to measure success, revise goals and plan for the future. At a whole-school level, there is clear evidence that goals are set and reset in order to drive the school forward and that monitoring and review leads to flexible and well-planned redeployment of resources to meet identified needs.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: High School for Youth and Community Development (HS 537)	∅	✓	+
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	