



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**High School for Service and Learning**

**High School 539**

**911 Flatbush Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11226**

**Principal: L Kassan**

**Dates of review: September 25 – 26, 2006**

**Reviewer: Martyn Groucutt**

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## Part 1: The school context

## **Information about the school**

The school is a small new 21<sup>st</sup> Century High School now in its third year, with students in grades 9 to 11 and reaching full capacity with grade 12 next year. There are currently 338 students on roll, of whom 14 are special education students and 12 are English language learners.

It serves a diverse community, with 78% of the students being Black and a further 17.4% Hispanic. The locality has a transient population, which creates problems in terms of the continuity of education for some students, with a stability of only 81% in the student population last year. The school receives Title 1 funding. All the general classrooms are physically separated from the main area occupied by the school, and this is a barrier to the overall cohesion of the school.

The school has a formal partnership with the YMCA, which enhances its social provision and ideals of public service which lie at the heart of its vision. Other local partnerships, such as that with Brooklyn College, also help to widen and enrich the opportunities available to the students.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal and assistant principal form an effective partnership, bringing vision and direction to the school.
- There is a very positive link with the Brooklyn YMCA as a formal partner, and with other local organizations, such as Brooklyn College, strengthening the advisory curriculum and developing students' social awareness.
- There is a culture of team work and mutual respect between leaders, teachers, support staff and students which creates what the students describe as 'a family atmosphere'.
- Teaching staff are involved in policy formulation, such as the published policies on assessment and on discipline, creating a common ownership.
- There is a range of additional programs providing opportunities for students to make up lost ground and gain additional credits.
- There are clear and effective procedures for following up on lateness and absence, starting on the first day.
- Work is proceeding at a good pace to enhance the existing use of data and to strengthen the role of advisory time, with the support of teachers.

### What the school needs to improve

- Make fuller use of data to track the progress of all groups of students represented in the school.
- Develop the use of data at the classroom level to ensure that individual failure is identified early and needs are met.
- Strengthen the use of differentiation in teaching to increase the confidence of teachers in implementing individual education plans effectively.
- Formalize the process of professional development to include opportunities to observe first-class professional practice.
- Implement procedures to ensure the school has good quality information about all students before they enter grade 9.
- Enhance the role of computer technology as a tool for teaching and learning, including the completion of the computer laboratory.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

After a difficult start, the school is now making more effective use of data to drive up academic standards, though there is still a way to go. In particular there is not enough focus on implementing plans to ensure that individual students who are falling behind can be identified clearly and early enough for effective intervention. This is being addressed, but systems are not yet fully in place. The key role that is being developed within the school falls within the professional responsibilities of the assistant principal. There is an acceptance that there remains work to be done, but the overall judgment of 'proficient' reflects the fact that progress is being made and the school is aware of the areas where further refinement of practice will bring about further improvement.

There is a real commitment to success from staff and students that indicates the school has the potential for continuing progress beyond the considerable gains that have already been made. During the first year after opening the first principal resigned, and the school is now in its third base in three years. The present principal has stabilized the situation and has already brought about positive change, including the appointment of a very effective assistant principal. The changes have brought rising academic standards and improved morale among staff, students and parents.

### 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.**

When the current principal took up his post at the school towards the end of its first year there was very little data available on its first cohort. This group, which is now starting 11<sup>th</sup> grade underachieved at the end of the school's first year. Since then steps have been taken to gather and use relevant data in the school to prevent this occurring again in future years. Data is used to identify the performance of students so that they can be accurately placed in one of three groupings. The first is for general education students, the second provides for recovery programs (an important provision in a school where a considerable number enter still performing at level 1) and the third provides for accelerated study. Information gathered throughout the year during the three marking periods allows for flexibility and movement between these pathways.

All the teachers, except two, have arrived since the school's unsatisfactory first year, and many of them are young and inexperienced. A challenge for the leadership is to develop their understanding of data and its use. For example, there is room for improvement in the use of differentiation in teaching and in the ability to implement fully the demands of individual education plans. The school has identified this need and is seeking to address it through further professional development.

However, there is no doubt that there is now a much greater range of data available and teachers are more able to monitor progress and achievement within the groups that they are teaching. The remaining challenge is to refine the use of data to provide an effective measure of individual progress and identify those who are falling behind to make the

progress of which they are capable. The school has improved its ability to identify the big differences in achievement between its best and worst performing content areas (last year 80% passed the Regents test in mathematics, yet only 43% in social studies) and to take steps to rectify these differences.

**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.**

Many students arrive at the school performing at levels well below that which might be expected, many still at level 1. Problems are compounded when the records of previous achievement are sometimes not received from their previous schools, and by the transient nature of the local community, which sees students arrive and depart during the school year.

A good range of strategies are in place to support learning, with an emphasis being placed on addressing the deficit in achievement in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. These include recovery classes, after school study, Saturday and summer schools. A good example of the effectiveness of this is that when students re-took their living environment Regents test after a period at summer school, the results improved by 15%.

At present the ability to look at the progress of groups of students is more advanced than the ability to track individuals. Recently completed developmental work undertaken by the assistant principal is aimed at making further great improvements but it is yet to be fully implemented. It addresses the current difficulty in being able to highlight the students who are not succeeding. In addition, the agreed plans to strengthen the role of advisory time will enable teachers able to work more effectively with individuals who are most at risk of failure.

Set against this area for improvement is an aspect where great strides have already been made. The school asks all members of the school community to focus on driving up student performance and progress as a key activity. An example of this is the very successful partnership with the YMCA which is strengthening the wider curriculum and engaging students in a way that encourages them to seek success. Similarly, broader elements of social support such as the Teen-Talk program build the confidence and social development of young people and their ability to benefit from the formal education system.

**Quality Statement 3 – Build and Align Capacity: 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 organization of each grade into parallel pathways, with students assigned to them following an analysis of test results over the summer, allows the school to align instructional activity around whole-class learning. At this stage, the full implementation of a fully individualized curriculum is still in development. Teachers are happy to accept responsibility for improving instruction and outcomes, a process supported by weekly grade and faculty meetings, and through very regular informal meetings. However, not all staff plan at the correct level for all individuals, particularly those students who have an individual education plan and who are performing at a low level of literacy.

At times the tight budget appears to restrict learning activity, and documented need cannot be met. For instance, the school says it cannot afford to fund a teacher for training in using Wilson literacy. Sometimes the failure to complete aspects of the building development, such as the wiring of the computer lab, is also a hindrance, though good use is made of the bank of lap-tops that the school possesses.

Students say that they now enjoy coming to school (the older students comparing it very favorably with the former situation) and there is a good level of student involvement in classes. The school stresses the importance of group and collaborative learning, so students sit in small groups and are encouraged to participate in oral work. This is proving to be a successful approach in terms of motivation and the reinforcement of positive learning. There is a mutual respect between the school leadership, teachers, other adults and the students, which creates what was described as one student as, 'a family atmosphere'. Teachers certainly know their students as individuals, so they are in a good position to utilize the improvements in data provision that are being introduced.

Efforts to improve attendance and punctuality are a strong feature of the school; any absence is followed up on the first day. The parent coordinator is a very effective member of the school team, as is the student counselor who works successfully in a one-to-one relationship in supporting considerable numbers of students.

**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 well developed.**

All adults in the school show a real commitment to the students and work hard to encourage their success. Teachers play a positive role in the development of policy and practice, such as in the published policies on behavior and on assessment. The principal leads from the front and has been instrumental in bringing about a real change in the culture and in raising expectations in the school.

Teachers meet together very regularly and plan, evaluate and revise in a collaborative way. The principal believes that this will encourage a common ownership and expectation and evidence suggests that he has been proved correct. Teachers seek to evaluate and improve their practice, though the number of young and inexperienced teachers limits the number of effective role models within school. This shows the need to provide opportunities to observe good practice elsewhere. Teachers are observed in their classrooms frequently, and supportive dialogue seeks to move them forward in terms of instructional competence. However, at the moment a more formal process of professional development with clear objectives for teachers to achieve and clear statements of professional development is not yet in place.

The principal has already had a major impact in changing the direction and effectiveness of the school. Together with his assistant principal, he shows a vision and clear direction that is already turning the school around after its difficult start. He has the full respect of staff and students. The school is now running smoothly and there are clear expectations on both students and staff that together they will make this a community that will develop both academically and socially. However, a barrier to the overall cohesion of the school is that all its general classrooms are physically separated from the main area occupied by the school.

The commitment to youth development is a strength, exemplified by the formal link with the YMCA and with other local organizations such as Brooklyn College. These provide excellent opportunities for students to develop their social awareness and commitment. The student government has provided some students with opportunities to meet with other committed young people from around Brooklyn, and one has been elected 'mayor' of Brooklyn's student council.

**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.**

Diagnosis of need is now moving steadily in the direction of focusing on individual rather than group needs. At the end of the first year of the school's life, an almost total lack of any meaningful data meant that it was impossible to measure the overall deficit in achievement. The school now accepts that it needs to develop clear systems that enable the curriculum to be individualized. It is to the credit of the teachers that they have accepted an advanced advisory role that will see them as important partners in the monitoring of individual progress and identification of students at risk of failing. This will complement the work already being undertaken by the student counselor. At present, use of interim goals and diagnostic assessments to support students to meet their individual targets is insufficiently developed.

From the start of this academic year the school has implemented a baseline assessment on entry. This was in part to overcome the difficulties of not receiving information from the feeder schools. Information gathered through the three marking periods is increasingly being used to create clarity on individual progress. The school is flexible in its groupings, so that there is movement between the three academic pathways. The most notable is the movement of students who have been in receipt of additional intervention and recovery programs. These have moved into the general education group within a year if their results show sufficient gains. There is a growing awareness of what is required and an increasingly sophisticated use is being made of the available data.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: High School for Service and Learning (HS 539)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	Ø	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	Ø	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	Ø	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	