



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Brooklyn School for Music and Theatre**

**High School 548**

**883 Classon Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11225**

**Principal: Kieran J McGuire**

**Dates of review: May 9 - 10, 2007**

**Reviewer: Joy Richardson**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Brooklyn School for Music and Theatre has 390 students in grades 9 through 12. It opened in 2003 as one of four new schools in a building previously occupied by one large high school. The school has added one grade each year, and its first students graduate in 2007. 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.

The school population comprises 82% Black and 10% Hispanic students, and small percentages of White, Asian and students of other ethnic backgrounds. Three quarters of the students are female. The school has 12% special education students and less than 1% English language learners. Title 1 eligibility, at 63%, is higher than in similar schools and in all City schools. The attendance rate of 89.4% is above the average for the City and similar schools.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school aims high for all its students, setting their sights on graduation, college and success in life.
- The principal creates a climate where everyone is respected, valued and supported, making high expectations achievable.
- The school analyzes students' progress with great care, to pinpoint where action is needed.
- Timely interventions keep students on track to graduate successfully, and strongly support those most in need of improvement.
- Careful scheduling maximizes opportunity across the academic and arts programs.
- Teachers share ideas and learn from each other in working to improve instruction.
- Key skills in literacy are developed in all disciplines.
- Students are helped to gain social and emotional understanding, and the discipline and determination needed for success in learning.
- The school is orderly and there has been a sharp decline in behavioral incidents.
- The school encourages reflection on what it is doing well and what it could do better.

### What the school needs to improve

- Develop planning so that goals are more widely shared and progress towards them is clearly measured.
- Extend evaluation by all staff of the effectiveness of their instruction in engaging students and improving outcomes.
- Build the skills of teachers in using data to secure students' learning.
- Involve students and parents more fully in understanding where improvement is needed, and in recognizing achievements.
- Articulate the school's vision for its students throughout the school community.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

The principal has developed a school that is clearly focused on bringing the best out of students. He is rigorous in pursuing high academic achievement, alongside the development of personal and performance skills. Working closely with the assistant principal, cabinet and staff, he creates an atmosphere of uncompromising high expectations combined with support for students and understanding of their needs. Students' progress and results are analyzed to identify where intervention and guidance are needed, and curriculum programs are adapted accordingly. Theatre skills are woven through the school's approach to instruction, seeking to improve teaching and learning. Teachers know students well and do much to help them succeed. However, teachers vary in the extent to which they use data and evaluate their own teaching in order to help students learn better. The school provides an orderly atmosphere, encouraging respectful behavior and developing students' skills in relating to others and managing their own emotions. As a result, behavioral incidents have declined steeply, reducing distractions from teaching and learning. The school is now seeing its first class graduate and it shows a strong capacity to continue to improve student outcomes. It is now in a good position to share its vision more widely, celebrating what has been achieved, and working towards clear goals that are recognized by the whole community.

### 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 uses a range of data, including report cards from each marking period and the results of Regents examinations, to check the progress of all students, including English language learners' progress. This information is analyzed by the administration at individual, grade and class level and interpreted effectively to highlight where action is needed.

The school has an overarching goal of 80% graduation, and makes frequent interim use of data to monitor progress against this benchmark. The principal has a very clear overview of trends, particularly the proportion of students in each grade on track to graduate. Differences between subjects or teachers are noted and discussed. Some comparisons are drawn with similar schools, and particularly with other small 'New Visions' high schools within the City. As its first students reach graduation this year, the school is gaining a better perspective on the progress of students over time.

The school analyzes carefully how well different groups of students are doing, identifying any specific weaknesses in learning. It tracks the progress of special education students, tailoring collaborative team teaching to their needs. The school is particularly concerned to monitor progress by gender, in the light of its large female majority and the anticipated recruitment of more male students.

In considering the school's data, the view of the principal is that 'nothing is good enough'. This leads to a strong ambition for students' success, in graduating from high school, in taking advanced courses and in gaining access to college.

**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 principal works with teachers to interpret data, in order to consider implications for the next steps in students’ learning and the means of reaching school, class and individual goals. Teachers’ use of data is developing, although there is variation in their capacity to identify the actions required in order to reach high goals, and to measure the progress that results.

The school seeks ways to help the many students, including special education students, whose lack of proficiency in English language arts holds back their learning in all content areas. Collaborative team teaching in most classes in grades 9 and 10 detects gaps in students’ learning and finds ways of remedying these. An intensive, computerized daily reading program is used to accelerate reading amongst those most in danger of falling further behind. Teachers in social studies and English language arts work closely together so that literacy skills are applied and reinforced in other contexts. Teachers have identified that poor results often stem from weakness in writing essays, and students have been given extra help to master the skills required. Sessions in smaller groups are arranged for those who require more individual attention in order to succeed, and individual tutoring helps pupils to overcome specific difficulties in learning. The students say that the teachers are always ready to help them in reaching their goals.

Guidance counselors help students to understand what is required for success, and this is reinforced in classes and advisory sessions. Parent consultations and letters home after report cards make clear what remains to be done. All students are expected to work for the Regents diploma. Many are encouraged to aim higher and the school is increasing the range of advanced courses that it offers.

The school recognizes and honors students’ achievement but does not always celebrate this in ways that help to motivate others. Older students are eager for opportunities to use their experience to mentor freshmen, to help them make the most of all opportunities and to focus on their goals from the start.

**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 school is skilful in providing the mandated academic curriculum alongside its music and theatre theme. It has a clear vision for doing this, believing that the arts provide ways of teaching and learning that are applicable across the whole program and support achievement in all areas. Ways of working in drama are carried across into classes in all disciplines, with support from visiting theatre teachers. All students participate in studio productions, learning to work creatively as a team. Music is less strongly developed at present, but plans are in hand to accelerate learning through continuity within an after school program. The school selects and adapts the curriculum in ways designed to maximize pupils’ learning. For example, it is developing technology as a tool for teaching and learning. The use of

smartboards in classrooms is growing; and there are plans to give students greater access to computers throughout the school.

Teachers reflect on methods of instruction and their impact on students' learning. This is helped by an open culture where teachers work alongside others. They regularly observe others teach and give feedback on what they have observed. They differentiate instruction on occasions when team teaching, and by organizing smaller classes when students need specific help. In many classes, students are actively engaged in ways that build understanding, for example in chemistry. The school is working to extend teachers' awareness of how methods of instruction affect student outcomes, and of how data measures the effectiveness of teaching.

Staffing and budgetary decisions are closely aligned to the school's goals and plans for improving students' learning. Skilful scheduling makes good use of time so that students develop performance skills without compromising the pursuit of academic goals.

The principal and all the staff know students well. Students appreciate the small size of the school and the sense of family that this generates. They appreciate the care and guidance they receive, for example in preparing for exams and applying for college. The rate of suspensions has dropped sharply over the last three years. Poor behavior is consistently challenged. The principal gives a strong lead in maintaining a calm and orderly atmosphere that is conducive to learning. Absences are followed up swiftly, and the school insists on prompt arrival at lessons.

**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 staff work well together, with the support of the school's leadership. Selection processes ensure a high level of commitment to students and to improving performance and progress.

Professional development is shaped by the needs of students and the school's goals and is focused on improving the quality of instruction. Staff have benefited, as an Empowerment school, from training in collaborative team teaching that is now helping them in meeting class and individual needs. Ongoing implementation of the school's theatre theme supports teachers in working together across the disciplines to find ways of bringing learning to life.

The principal and assistant principal regularly observe classroom teaching, providing both support and challenge to improve the quality of instruction. Teachers participate with enthusiasm in well-focused peer observation, and this is laying foundations for extending self-evaluation across the school, for students as well as staff. The leadership and faculty work together in evaluating results and planning interventions with a view to driving improvement. Teachers plan together informally within departments and sometimes across subject disciplines.

The principal is well respected by staff, students and parents. They recognize that he has high expectations, and appreciate his support and understanding for individuals. The school's rapid development in recent years reflects his strong capacity to manage change, providing clear direction while also empowering others.

The school runs smoothly and communication is good. Procedures and routines are clear, well understood by students and generally followed. Staff are encouraged and enabled to

spend time together, and the needs of students are central to their discussions. The administration liaises effectively with the other schools that share the building.

Support services are aligned to the school's academic goals. The school has a very effective partnership with a theatre education company, which supports the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school, as well as extending students' theatre 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.**

Regular evaluation of students' progress and of teaching practices feeds into the structuring of plans and interventions to enhance learning. The school's annual Comprehensive Education Plan reviews progress to date and outlines goals that are clearly related to the acceleration of students' progress and the means of bringing this about.

Representatives from the whole school community are involved in reviewing improvement plans. For example, at a recent retreat, school leaders, faculty members, parents and students identified areas where the school could do better. Conclusions from such discussions are rapidly disseminated and incorporated into ongoing plans.

The school has a good overview of progress within and across classrooms, using data to monitor progress towards stated goals. As an Empowerment School, it has identified the need for more focused use of periodic assessments to provide deeper, diagnostic insights. It is seeking to develop further the involvement of all staff in the interim measurement of progress towards stated goals and in evaluating the effectiveness of interventions.

The school is flexible in responding to students' needs as they are identified. It adapts and modifies plans when necessary to keep on course towards its goals. Now that the school is reaching maturity with its first graduating class, it is in a position to share more widely its ambition for students, and to sustain the pursuit of its vision for the future over successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Brooklyn School of Music and Theatre (HS 548)</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>	∅	✓	+
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>	∅	✓	+
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>	∅	✓	+
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	