



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**New York Harbor School**

**High School 551**

**400 Irving Avenue  
New York  
NY 11237**

**Principal: Nathan Dudley**

**Dates of review: March 20 - 21, 2007**

**Reviewer: Peter Lewis**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

New York Harbor High School is a recently-established high school located in Brooklyn, though attracting students from an increasingly wide area of the City. It serves just fewer than 400 students across grades 9 through 12. The number of students in the school has been increasing since the school opened in 2003, as it has been building towards its full capacity with this year seeing the first graduating class.

The number of English language learners (14%) is lower than is seen in similar schools and in schools across the City as is the proportion of special education students (6%). Approximately 67% of students are Hispanic, 31% are Black, and a small proportion comes from other backgrounds. The school is eligible for Title 1 funding with a higher proportion of eligible students than is seen in either similar schools or those across the City. Attendance, at just below 90%, is higher than in similar schools as a result of the emphasis that the school has placed on this area.

The school has successfully applied to join the first year of the Empowerment Schools initiative. Empowerment Schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. They 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

- The principal has built the school in relation to a very clear vision that, increasingly, is strongly reflected in its practice.
- Senior leaders share the vision of the school to an exceptionally high degree and consequently are very effective in helping teachers to develop their practice.
- Collaboration between members of the school community is strong and underpinned by well developed professional relationships characterized by mutual respect.
- Staff at all levels are strongly motivated.
- A good start has been made in building a picture of student achievement through the use of data.
- The school has worked hard to build an unusually broad and stimulating curriculum which considerably extends student learning in English and mathematics.
- The school promotes students' self esteem and independence very well which has a positive impact on their aspirations and on their learning.
- High expectations for students and for staff characterize the school's work.

### What the school needs to improve

- Agree and implement those features of instruction which exemplify the school's expectations for its teachers and evaluate their impact on learning through focused monitoring.
- Ensure that all teachers make good use of assessment in planning differentiated activities appropriate to students' learning needs.
- Use assessment information in setting targets for students' learning that are related clearly to their potential.
- Ensure that key elements of the school's development are identified and that the steps towards their achievement are recorded in clear plans for improvement.
- Review the range of management responsibilities and accountabilities in relation to the increased size and complexity of the school.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

The principal, with the strong support of his assistant principal, has achieved much in the comparatively short space of time that the school has been open. A strong and stimulating curriculum has been established and data is increasingly well used in identifying aspects of teaching which require improvement. These features reflect the very high expectations that have been set and modeled by the principal and senior staff. Clear systems have been established which ensure that day to day organization runs smoothly. Students respond well to the range of opportunities that are planned and, as a result, their behavior and self confidence are well developed and they demonstrate an eagerness to learn. The school presents a calm and welcoming atmosphere which strongly reflects its character and mission.

The school has worked hard to establish a good range of information about students' achievement which, increasingly, helps departments and faculty to identify where the curriculum is successful and where improvements need to be planned. The emphasis on improving teachers' use of data is comparatively new and, because of this, leaders know that more remains to be done in establishing consistency. This is particularly so in establishing an understanding of best practice and its impact on the degree to which all lessons are planned in relation to student need.

The variety of partnerships that have been established by the school significantly enhance the opportunities available to students and, as a result, their learning. Particularly good use is made of the City environment in enabling students to consolidate skills learned in the classroom within real life situations. Parents are fully supportive of the school and describe the value that it adds to their children's experiences and to their education. They feel welcomed in the school, and know that their children are well cared for and supported in their learning.

### **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 has collated a good range of information that has provided it with a very clear picture of student achievement through subjects, classes and grades. Data comparison has enabled the school to compare the performance of its students with that in other schools. In a similar way, a good start has been made in the collation of data which enables comparisons across the different ethnicities represented in the school. This is a particular issue for the school as it has a comparatively high proportion of English language learner students, as well as a high proportion of special education students and those who start in 9th grade at below grade level. The success of the interventions that are planned from these analyses is seen in the improved passing rates of both groups of students. Regular meetings focusing on the performance of students have significantly strengthened the school's evaluation of its effectiveness. Special education and support teachers work well with general education teachers, through the school's collaborative

model, in reviewing data to identify intervention points and strategies from the analysis of test data. As a result, the support provided to students is closely targeted to areas of study which require strengthening.

The school has also made a good start in projecting student achievement, rather than simply reacting to past test scores. Patterns are carefully analyzed as, for example, in the comparison of performance between classes taking the same course but taught by different teachers. In the same way, the identification of its Regents pass rates being slightly higher than class pass rates supports the school's assertion that expectations are high. The application of interim testing in mathematics and English has helped in allowing action to be taken at an earlier stage than was previously the case, and the school recognizes the need to extend this good practice across social studies and the range of sciences that make up the curriculum.

**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.**

Appropriate goals are set for student achievement. These are challenging and follow a careful review of student progress, particularly in English language arts and mathematics through each marking period. This ensures that discussions between school leaders, departments and guidance staff remain focused on improving student achievement. In a similar way, the analysis of passing rates enables weaknesses in the curriculum and in aspects of teaching to be identified and action planned to secure improvement. The format of the Comprehensive Education Plan goes some way to support this process; however, the school recognizes that the focus on external and internally developed testing is overly retrospective. As a result, it is difficult for the school to establish priorities in its development planning, as all improvement areas carry the same weight. This hampers the school both in tracking its progress and in responding sufficiently quickly to difficulties that arise in students' learning. In response, and with good external support, analyses are being developed which focus more on the performance of groups within the school and, particularly, on the progress made towards graduation.

The identification of students who are on, almost on, or who are off track, helps staff to focus closely on the different levels of need. Although this ensures that a good level of support is given to students who are most in need, the school recognizes that equal attention given to 'on track' students has the potential to further stretch students who are high achievers. Parents are well informed about their children's progress. This communication is particularly effective for students who have identified difficulties in their learning. Regular meetings involving teachers and support and guidance staff ensure a rapid response to emerging issues, and the outcomes are reported to parents, ensuring their full involvement. Conferencing with students is well established so that they know how well they are doing and are aware of the school's high expectations of them. The school is working to ensure that these strategies are applied consistently for all students, so that all members of the community are actively involved in securing improvement.

**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 has ensured that its curriculum not only aligns well with local and State requirements, but that it is enriched and extended to fully reflect the school’s mission. A particular strength of curriculum is in the degree to which its breadth matches students’ interest and engages them fully. The very good use of the environment of New York, with well developed courses have components that are taught away from the school, builds students’ self esteem and independence as well as their academic understanding across a broad range of areas of study. Advanced courses covering mathematics, English and the sciences support students’ college application eligibility and strongly support the school’s view that its role is to support students’ ability to graduate through college as opposed to simply getting there. This has enabled developments to be initiated, such as in the development of comprehensive curriculum maps, in which links are being developed to support students in their learning across subjects. The principal and assistant principal, together with the literacy coach, provide good support in this, particularly in articulating a clear sense of teachers’ accountability. This has yet to be fully understood by teachers, as is seen in the inconsistency with which differentiated instruction is planned or data from interim assessments is used to plan appropriately challenging work. None the less, in the best practice, students are challenged at a very high level that is appropriate to their abilities. In these lessons, teachers use conferencing, exemplification and probing discussion to make students think. The level of student engagement in the best lessons and activities is high.

The school budget is very well managed and, linked with very clear staffing and scheduling decisions relating to appointments and to the acquisition of resources, impacts strongly on the school’s development. Attendance is improving as a result of the clear systems that have been put in place and they are supported well by staff. This reflects the degree to which staff have students’ welfare at heart. As a result, relationships are good and students say that they have confidence in their teachers and other adults.

**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, very well supported by the assistant principal, has applied a very clear vision to the school’s development since it opened nearly four years ago. As a result of the ‘open’ style of leadership that was appropriately established as the school grew towards its capacity, there is a high degree of collegiality, understanding and commitment that characterizes staff discussion. Leaders attend departmental and review meetings. These are well focused on student achievement with data increasingly being used in identifying areas for improvement and the establishment of regular conferences enables teachers to become aware of best practice across department boundaries. There is, however, a degree of frustration that is shared by both leaders and faculty, that decisions that could be made collectively and, to a degree, informally when the school was much smaller are less effective within a larger and more complex organization. Too much time, as a result, is spent in discussions that do not always lead to clear decisions or lines of action. However, the principal and assistant principal have the respect of faculty, staff, students and parents.

The principal has a clear philosophy of attracting, selecting and developing staff at all levels who are skilled, analytical and who will use their expertise to provide the best for students. At the same time, he has demonstrated the ability to take strong decisions in those cases where staff development has not secured improvement. Professional development has a high profile, although the school recognizes that there is not always enough time to follow up and consolidate initiatives, or to allow for common preparation. Senior leaders' frequent observations of teaching have a clear focus on student engagement and learning in observations, characterized by the question; "How did you know that they got it?" The development of teachers' professional binders has the potential to enable the school to track its staff development more closely in relation to improvements in student learning. A strong feature of the school as it has developed is the degree to which staff have been involved in establishing and modifying organizational systems and routines. As a result, the school runs smoothly. Very strong links have been established with outside bodies which contribute well to students' high expectations of themselves and to their learning. The degree to which the school utilizes this collaboration is a significant strength and, as in the partnership with the South Street Seaport museum which provides the opportunity to work on board an historic sailing vessel, extends student experience to an unusual degree. Alongside effective guidance and support systems, these features have made a positive impact on student achievement.

**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 undeveloped.**

Since the school's inception, considerable emphasis has been placed on establishing a climate in which learning can take place and in developing the curriculum to focus on success across a broad range of experience. In this, it has been successful as is demonstrated by both the improvements secured in student learning and in their independence and sense of self esteem. Interim assessment data has been introduced, and has begun to be used to increasingly good effect in modifying programs for students in relation to their success. There remains, however, too much inconsistency in the degree to which teachers across subjects understand the characteristics of good instruction, and make use of this in planning fully challenging work for all students. In whole school planning, goals are set in broad terms but the school recognizes that its systems for measuring progress towards achieving its goals, or the factors that have influenced greater or reduced success, are limited. As a result, the school is generally only able to determine whether interventions have achieved their planned aim retrospectively. The Comprehensive Education Plan is broadly accurate in its identification of development needs and, to a lesser extent, of plans designed to address these but is not used sufficiently as a working document. Consequently, staff at different levels do not have a good enough understanding of precisely what improvements are planned or of their part in securing success. An example of this is in the school's forthcoming change of location. As yet, there is no coherent plan in place which establishes a sequence for linking building, curricular and staffing requirements in relation to the move. This means that the stepped changes which will be needed to secure a smooth transition have yet to be identified, and so it will be difficult to identify if the school is on track towards achieving its goals or whether modifications are required.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: New York Harbor School (HS 551)</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		