



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Brownsville Academy High School

High School 568

**1150 East New York Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11212**

Principal: Joanne Nabors

Dates of review: May 3 - 4, 2007

Reviewer: Corinne Brown

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Brownsville Academy High School is located in Brooklyn and serves a student population of 229. The students are over aged and under credited. The majority of students, 86%, are Black with the remainder, at 14%, Hispanic. Approximately 3% of students are English language learners and 5% are special education students. Title 1 eligibility is approximately 68%, which is the same as similar schools but slightly higher than City averages. Attendance, at approximately 76%, is equivalent to similar schools but lower than the average for City schools.

The school was opened in September 2004 by the current principal as the first Diploma Plus model school in New York City and State. As such it offers a competency based, thematic curriculum that is aligned to City and State standards. Students participate in internships, accelerated credits and dual enrollment in college. There are many special academic programs offered, such as forensic science, media communications and Model United Nations. Other initiatives include the Learning to Work program, whereby students develop portfolios, acquire employment skills and undertake paid internships, and College Now.

The school building is spacious and light, with many specialist facilities including science laboratories, art rooms and a well-equipped library and media center.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school benefits from the dynamic leadership of a caring principal who has a determined vision and positive optimism.
- A culture of respect permeates all relationships in the school, with high expectations made visible and explicit.
- The school uses data carefully to monitor individual and school performance.
- The school strives to achieve the highest outcomes for each student, in close partnership with parents and students.
- All staff are dedicated and work together creatively to engage students.
- Professional development is well embedded in the school, based on staff needs and the Diploma Plus model.
- The school offers a broad student-centered curriculum that includes life skills and post-graduation preparation.
- The school is a calm, well-organized and richly resourced haven where self-esteem is nurtured and success celebrated.
- Strong links with outside partners and comprehensive support services have been established to raise student aspirations as lifelong learners.
- The high level of student involvement in decision-making throughout the school fosters self-esteem and a sense of responsibility.

What the school needs to improve

- Incorporate interim benchmarks and timeframes in whole school and other planning to refine the monitoring process.
- Refine curriculum team planning further to ensure that differentiated activities meet the needs of all students.
- Ensure schedule changes incorporate meaningful exchange of student information between all stakeholders.
- Explore further initiatives and incentives to consolidate and build on attendance and punctuality.
- Build on existing parental support by extending opportunities for cooperative involvement and activities, as begun by the committed new parent coordinator.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with well-developed features.

Brownsville Academy provides a safe and nurturing small school haven for the students who enter through its doors. Students who have not found success in other settings, particularly the larger high schools, change direction through the intense support given by all staff working in partnership with parents. To gain admission to Brownsville, students must demonstrate the right attitude and a willingness to work hard to quickly accumulate the credits they have not already gained.

Students are fully involved in all aspects of the school, from staff selection through to cabinet meetings. By treating them with respect and fostering responsibility, the school builds the confidence and self-esteem of its students, laying foundations for positive outcomes. The small size of the school means that personalized instruction and comprehensive encouragement from all adults is the norm. Testimonies to its success are the frequent visits by alumni, and that current students travel significant distances to study here, such as from Staten Island.

The principal and staff model positive interpersonal relationships and offer diverse curricula experiences within a tight framework. They work hard so that no one falls behind. A calm, orderly environment, it is also colorful and filled with photographic and other evidence of success, endorsements to aim higher, and affirmations that, "We are the best!"

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 well developed.

This school uses all available data and collates information that it generates itself in order to provide an ongoing picture of individual and school performance. As soon as a student is offered a place, a thorough orientation session occurs to establish baseline information regarding the student's academic history, attendance patterns and relevant social and emotional factors. Monthly updates show progress over time towards credit accumulation and Regents scores. This means the school has a database of all student progress which is sorted to track particular groups. The English language arts and mathematics teams scrutinize student data, for example, to place students into classes. Although the school is mindful of ethnicity, English language learners, special education students and gender issues, it does not particularly track groups, as the focus is totally on individual graduation requirements.

Both hard and soft data is used to inform a comprehensive picture of individual performance, so competency based assessments, portfolios, observations and journals also contribute. Staff are adept at noticing changes in demeanor and body language, as they know students so well. Any such indicators are quickly investigated to ensure that the student is comfortable and able to learn. Data is analyzed to predict potential graduates.

This powerful predictive tool is shared with all teachers to facilitate even greater individual student focus. Similarly, the school tracks the college application status of students. Careful targeting means students reach their graduation goal in a timely fashion for this school. City data is analyzed at least twice a year, in January and June, to observe patterns or trends by subject, class and by teacher. Targeted action follows any noticeable inconsistencies. For example, English language arts introduced journalism which has resulted in increased student engagement and achievement. Within content areas the data produced is as consistent as possible, through the use of rubrics and competency based assessment.

Attendance is a major data source the school uses for looking at its particular population. The student's previous history sets a baseline, and daily monitoring means that percentage changes for the individual are used to target interventions. The school regularly compares its own attendance with that of other Diploma Plus schools, as it is a significant factor that impacts on this student population performance, as well as comparing performance information. The school uses data well to support its students towards achieving their goal of graduation and to evaluate its own performance over time.

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 well developed.

As this is a small school, all staff contribute to the pro-active formation of whole school plans, such as the Comprehensive Education Plan, and the professional development plan. These are in keeping with the school mission and the framework of Diploma Plus schools. Collaborative partnerships with parents, faculty and preparation for post-graduation means that all planning and goal setting encompasses transition planning for students, so they have aspirations.

The school strives to achieve the highest outcomes for every student, in close partnership with parents and the students themselves. This means the initial information gathered at student orientation meetings becomes the crucial data that informs programming for the individual. Scheduling is strategic and flexible during the year to accommodate changing student need. Departments meet weekly to fine-tune their instruction based on available student data and faculty also meet regularly as a whole group. All student progress in each content area is rigorously monitored to ensure that progress is on track. The school is aware that there are a few students who do not graduate, but transfer to a General Equivalency Diploma setting or college. The school attempts to track these moves but there are no City systems as yet in place to allow these to be confirmed.

All students and parents are fully aware of the high expectations of the school, which are made explicit and visible. Communication between all parties is continual, and the school makes strenuous efforts to initiate positive contact and frame all interactions in a positive manner. Parents feel valued and welcomed for their contribution which means they help achieve improved student outcomes. They know staff believe in the young adult's ability to achieve. This means that the school has the support of many committed and involved parents. It is working to build on this existing parental support through extending opportunities for cooperative involvement and activities, as begun by the committed new parent coordinator.

The high level of student involvement in decision-making throughout the school, such as attendance at cabinet meetings, fosters self-esteem and a sense of responsibility, and significantly contributes to expectations being met.

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 curriculum is aligned with the Diploma Plus competency framework and other essential State standards. The school offers a broad student-centered curriculum that includes life skills and post-graduation preparation. Competency based rubrics and portfolios mean students demonstrate mastery at different levels, but are encouraged to aim higher, through incremental, clearly-defined steps. Daily leadership, or advisory sessions build on social and emotional development and contribute to the culture of respect that permeates all relationships in the school. Internships and the College Now program bear direct relation to improved student outcomes.

Teacher passions enrich the curriculum so that students are engaged by options such as ceramics, anthropology, and journalism, together with increasing use of technology to deliver the curriculum. All staff are dedicated, accountable and work together creatively to engage students by making activities varied, interesting and relevant to real life. Differentiation occurs in instruction and the school is working to further refine this to meet the differing needs of all students. It is also working to ensure that information about students is consistently shared when schedule changes occur, such as each semester. Scheduling and associated staffing take individual student need and desired outcomes into account. The budget is managed well, within the constraints imposed from outside, to provide resources not found in many schools, such as a library and media center and a chemistry laboratory.

Students really appreciate the open and respectful culture of the school, where they feel respected and able to discuss personal as well as academic issues in a supportive way. They feel that the school operates with tough love principles. Students say that the school is like having a second family and that, “It’s built around a lot of positive energy and love”.

The school uses a wide variety of strategies in its strong focus on student attendance. Despite these intensive efforts, lateness and cutting is an ongoing issue for this school, in common with similar schools. It is exploring even further initiatives and incentives to consolidate and build on attendance and punctuality.

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.

An extensive selection process for staff, which includes student participation, means that all members of the adult school community are in tune with the mission and vision. They are expected to bring something to the school, in addition to content expertise and a willingness to use data to set high expectations, so are given responsibilities which help them develop professionally and quickly become integrated into the faculty. Many staff are

new to the school or profession, but all have quiet authority matched by energy and passion to do their best for the students.

Professional development is embedded in this school which believes in lifelong learning. Scheduled faculty development, matched to whole school needs and based on the Diploma Plus model, is led by consultants or utilizes expertise from within faculty. Teachers are encouraged to pursue personal areas of interest and to turnkey their learning to colleagues. They are committed, open and receptive. In this way capacity is built, including effectiveness in data use to improve student outcomes and staff are empowered. Staff collaborate and support each other extensively, informally and through regular meetings. They are working to deepen communication about individual student progress and differentiated instruction through more frequent inter-visitations.

The principal is a highly visible figure, exerts constant vigilance to uphold expectations and deliver encouragement. She knows every person in the building well and is held in high regard by the whole school community. Since she opened the school, she has built a caring but rigorous community, who work to improve student outcomes through positive interaction. This means the school is a calm, well-organized and richly resourced haven where self-esteem is nurtured and success celebrated.

In keeping with the Diploma Plus model, strong links with outside partners and comprehensive support services are an intrinsic part of school life, to raise student aspirations as lifelong learners. These include the internship and college programs and the exemplary work with the United Nations which students value highly.

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.

The school is fortunate to have strong leadership, not only from the principal and assistant principal, but also the school leadership team. The structure of the school means that students and all staff have a voice in whole school planning. The Comprehensive Education Plan, principal's performance review and professional development plan are all aligned and fully reflect student need as indicated by data. Regular meetings of varied teams, such the pupil personnel team, attendance committee and newly established data team, supplement the teamwork of content and advisory areas. This means that plans and goals are continually informally revised in the light of information from data. The school intends to incorporate interim benchmarks and timeframes in whole school and other planning to refine the monitoring process and thus recognize its own successes more frequently and formally.

The open culture and desire for community participation to improve student outcomes is exemplified by the retreats and town hall meetings that the school organizes. The school is reflective, innovative and continually seeks ways to increase student engagement and so improve outcomes. This school makes a significant and positive difference to students' lives.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Brownsville Academy High School (HS 568)	∅	✓	+
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	